



EDMUND RICE SCHOOLS TRUST (NI) LTD

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

24th October 2023

ANNUAL REPORT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

For period ending 31 August 2023

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE EDMUND RICE SCHOOLS TRUST (NI) LTD

The Edmund Rice Schools Trust (NI) was formally launched in February 2009 and began trading as a Company on 1st September 2009.

The Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors relates to the activities of the Board for the period 1 September 2022- 31 August 2023.

MEMBERS 2022 - 2023

Chair Mr John Cooley

Vice-Chair Mr Roddy Tierney

Members Br Denis Gleeson, Mr Gerry Scannell, Mr John McGettrick,
Mrs Diane Russell

DIRECTORS 2022 - 2023

Chair Mr Dermot McGovern

Directors Mrs Donna Tohill, Mr John Devine, Mr Micheál Martin,
Mr Eddie McArdle, Mr James Murray (from Oct)

COMPANY SECRETARY Mr Paul Shevlin

EXECUTIVE OFFICE Mr Seán Sloan, (From ~January 2023)

ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY Mrs Andrea Irwin

COMPANY ACCOUNTANT Mr Kevin Jennings

BOARD COMMITTEES

Ethos Committee Mr Eddie McArdle (Chair)

Finance and Resources Committee Mr Micheál Martin (Chair)

Child Safeguarding Procedures Designate Mrs Diane Russell

NOMINEES on EXTERNAL BODIES

Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE)

Mr D McGovern (Director), Mrs D Russell

Council Member of CCMS (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools)

Mrs D Russell

Down and Connor Education Committee of CCMS

Mr E McArdle

Strule Campus Management Company

Mr D. McGovern

OBJECTS OF THE TRUST

The **main object** of the Trust is to ensure and foster the advancement of education and to further the aims and purposes of Catholic education, in the Edmund Rice tradition, in schools owned or operated by the Trust, in accordance with the religious and education philosophy of the Trust as defined in the **Edmund Rice Schools Trust Charter**.

EDMUND RICE TRUST SCHOOLS (September 2022 - August 2023)

SCHOOL POPULATION 2022/2023						
School	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL PUPILS	TEACHERS	OTHER STAFF	POPULATION
Abbey CBGS	906		906	55	57	1018
Omagh CBGS	944	0	944	62	64	1070
St. Mary's CBGS	1182	0	1182	77	84	1343
All Saints College	628	230	858	66	96	1020
Edmund Rice College	481	316	797	57	54	908
Armagh PS	317	257	574	30	30	634
St Patrick's PS	224	223	447	25	54	526
John Paul II	159	167	326	16	32	374
	4841	1193	6034	388	471	6893

The Trust welcomes 4 new principals to their schools:

- Abbey CBGS, Newry – Mrs R. Savage
- Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh – Mr P. Doyle
- John Paul II Primary School, Belfast. - Ms M. McIntyre,(Acting)
- All Saints College, Belfast. - Mr D. Coyle, (Acting)

We wish Mr S. Sloan, Mr N. Smyth and Mr Raymond Hunter best wishes in their retirements and to Mrs B. Farrimond during her leave of absence.

EDMUND RICE SCHOOLS TRUST CHARTER

VISION *Promoting full personal and social development in caring Christian communities of learning and teaching*

MISSION *To provide Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition*

The Charter underpins and informs the work of the Trust which is delivered in three interrelated areas: **Ethos, Governance, Finance and Property.**

ETHOS

As the restrictions and concerns around Covid subsided, contact with schools became easier to facilitate. Visitations to schools were increased with all appropriate precautions observed. Of primary concern to the Trust at all times was the well-being of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and pupils. The Trust took positive and practical steps to bolster staff morale and support principals. Trustees are fully appreciative of the debt owed to both staff and governors as our schools have negotiated these difficult times.

The main activities undertaken during the year 2022-2023 in the area of Ethos, are summarised below.

This year saw a welcome return to liaison with Principals and teaching staff face to face meetings.

1. Induction Day for new teaching staff for the 2023-2024 was carried out in Westcourt on 25th August 2023 by S.Sloan with input from Mr Raymond Hunter, recently retired principal of John Paul II Primary School. 15 new teachers attended the day. The main themes discussed focussed on, teaching as a vocation, Edmund Rice Education and the inclusion of social justice issues and advocacy within Edmund Rice Education. The feedback through the course evaluations were entirely positive with a request for a follow-up day in June 2024.

In recognition of the unique needs of the newly formed All Saints College - an amalgamation of three schools, two of which are new to the Edmund Rice family - arrangements will be made to conduct a whole school induction day. This took place in the school over two days 28th and 29th September. A strong focus was made to the identity of the school as an Edmund Rice School with the relevance of the ER Charter at its core. It is recognised that much more support will be required from ERST to develop its identity.

2. The trust had hoped to resume its traditionally funded full day workshop for our primary school sector. The purpose of the primary school cluster and induction is to afford an opportunity to:
 - i. reaffirm the Trustees' understanding of Blessed Edmund's core messages;
 - ii. nurture and instil in teachers an understanding of their crucial role as educators and custodians of the future;
 - iii. highlight the elements of our Edmund Rice Charter, its Gospel Values, and the implications for our schools;
 - iv. recognise whole staff contributions and our appreciation of their commitment to our school communities.

On canvassing the views of staff, we found that, whilst they recognised the benefits of previous gatherings, some remained anxious regarding potential Covid issues and it was deemed appropriate to delay a return to full cluster arrangements until 2022/23. This has now been provisionally arranged for March 2024.

3. In collaboration with Westcourt, the Belfast based Edmund Rice Social Justice Centre of the Christian Brothers, a number of our schools have been involved in a range of activities, mainly focusing on homelessness, advocacy, social justice and the environment. This work has been somewhat restricted this year as schools continue to 'Reset' after COVID. However, a number of schools participated in such activities focusing on Homelessness and poverty.
A number of our school staff completed ASIST Suicide Intervention Training.
4. The Designated Person assigned to the role of oversight of Child Safeguarding Procedures and Pastoral Care has maintained regular contact with the key personnel in all schools. Trustees have been continuously updated with regard to welfare and other issues arising from the ongoing Covid situation.
Reports to Trustee meetings have indicated that the relevant policies and procedures are in place in each school and are being implemented appropriately.
The responsibility for Safeguarding Policies and implementation lies with the Board of Governors, Principal and Staff in each school.
Schools are encouraged to take advantage of shared good practice within other Edmund Rice schools to review and update existing policies.
The process of reviewing the Trust's Safeguarding Policy is now underway.
5. School activities, including Immersion Programme and Edmund Rice Summer School, had to be postponed this year due to the pandemic.
Two of our schools plan to travel to Africa during this academic year. Experienced Past-pupils ran a Summer Camp in Newry in July 2023 which was a great success.
6. Liaison has been maintained with the Edmund Rice Network Core Team of the Christian Brothers' European Province. The Trust remains actively involved in the global networking initiative Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders (EREBB) and, through the participation of trustees and school representatives, have built up contacts and relationships worldwide.
The Trust invited teachers to enrol for an online EREBB Leadership Course. Eight teachers registered and this was funded by the Trust.
In collaboration with the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (RoI), the Westcourt Centre and the Edmund Rice Education Office in England, initiatives regarding the Immersion Programme, homelessness, advocacy and the environment have also been greatly developed. Preliminary discussions regarding the dissemination of training materials on this range of issues has been initiated. The Trust was represented at The EREBB World Congress in Dublin during May 2023. Ongoing work is underway to develop collaborative projects within The European Chapter.
7. As schools work to return to normal operations, school leaders felt that it was too early, in Spring 2023 to return to the Annual Edmund Rice Awards event for primary and post-primary schools. Schools, however, were encouraged to continue their inhouse activities associated with the event and it is anticipated that the event will return in the coming year. The Trust made a grant available for each school to hold its own awards and celebrate Edmund Rice Feast day. Plans are already in place to host the awards during the week beginning 3rd April 2024.

8. In regard to the school-based promotion of ethos, whilst direct interactions with staff and governors were curtailed, the Trust finalised its guidance for Governors. This has progressed to publication stage and will be disseminated and discussed during the second school term. A training programme will be developed over the coming year to align with the reconstitution of Boards of Governors in June 2024.

GOVERNANCE

Activities undertaken in the area of Governance are summarised below.

1. The Board continues to engage with the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE) and with Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in a co-operative spirit for the benefit of the Catholic School Sector in Northern Ireland. The ERST nominee on the NICCE Board of Directors continues as a member of the Governance and Management Sub Committee of the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS).
2. The Education Authority has a major responsibility for the management of Controlled Schools and for services to Maintained Catholic Schools, Maintained Integrated Schools and Irish-Medium Schools. The CCMS remains as a Statutory Body to manage the Maintained Schools in the Catholic Sector. Voluntary Grammar Schools retain their existing levels of autonomy.
3. The Executive Officer and Directors have been involved, on a continuing basis, in guiding and advising schools on a range of proposals, initiatives and developments. The Trust is heavily involved with CSTS in developing RSE policy for schools on an All-Ireland basis. The trust has also made representations through DENI consultation process on Normalisation policy. The policy in line with ERST opinion has now been suspended.
4. Within this last year, the Trust has been heavily involved in: the planning of new builds; the completion of a new primary school, St. Patrick's Primary School, Belfast; capital works in existing schools; and the planning of education provision particularly in West Belfast and Omagh.
5. The original memorandum of agreement, to facilitate the Strule shared campus in Omagh was reviewed and accepted by all Managing Authorities / Trustees of the six schools. The Department of Education has now accepted a tender for the new build. The final Business Case is currently being developed. The target date for completion is 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter.
6. The development of archival and historical records for the Trust and schools is ongoing but has been curtailed by COVID restrictions. The present records include: the Service of Directors, Members and Governors; Associates of the Trust for those who have given an exceptional contribution to the work of the Trust and to Catholic

Education; Edmund Rice Medal for individuals whose contribution to Catholic and Edmund Rice Education has been outstanding; and the archiving of school records and memorabilia in collaboration with the Westcourt Centre.

7. All records held by ERST(NI) are now completely in line with GDPR policy and past school records have now been removed to The Christian brothers' Archive in Marino or PRONI.

Recipients of the Medal to date are Bishop Patrick Walsh, former Bishop of Down and Connor, Br Edmund Garvey, former European Leader of the Christian Brothers, Mr Gerry Lundy, former Deputy Chief Executive of CCMS, Mr Paul Shevlin, Company Secretary and Professor Muredach Dynan, former Chair of Directors and former Chair of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust.

8. Trustees and Executive Officer have actively engaged in important school events and celebrations. The Trust Office has engaged in co-ordinating and acknowledging receipt of Annual Census Returns, Inspection Reports and other correspondence from Principals and Boards of Governors.
9. The Trustees appoint four ninth's of the governors on a school Board, normally nine members. A number of Trustee members and directors serve on these Boards. The reconstitution of the Boards of all schools has been postponed by DENI until June 2024. The trust is currently reviewing the membership of each board and aims to reconstitute Abbey CBGS and Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh in advance of June to accommodate; The Abbey Grammar doubling the number of governors from nine to eighteen and Armagh losing a number of board members through resignations.
10. The Trust noted with concern that the recent appointment to Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh had gone ahead without notification to ERST and without the provision of The Charter an Edmund Rice literature to candidates. Following a meeting with the acting CEO, CCMS and ERST an undertaken was given to ensure all appropriate notification and literature would be provided.
11. A new handbook for trustee members of Boards of Governors has been completed and will be provided to all trustees serving on Boards of Governors. Training will also be provided to all trustees serving on Boards to ensure all are aware of the importance of the unique Edmund Rice ethos and charism within our schools.
12. As a registered charity, the Trust submitted its fifth Annual Monitoring Return to the Charities Commission in April 2023.

FINANCE AND PROPERTY

The Finance and Resources Committee oversaw all resource and finance matters on behalf of the Trust. The Statement of Accounts for the thirteenth year of financial operations was presented at the Annual General Meeting in October 2022.

Major aspects, relevant to Finance and Property matters, are identified below.

1. The Christian Brothers (CCBNI), under the leadership of Br Edmund Garvey, has agreed to fund the Trust for the next number of years.
The annual funding is £118,000.
2. The Edmund Rice Schools Trust continues to operate from purpose-built offices in the Westcourt Centre. These offices are provided by the Christian Brothers (CCBNI) on an annual licence to the Trust.
3. The Company maintains a robust communications infrastructure and systems to administer banking, payroll, taxation, accounting and company administration.
4. Financial updates, provided to meetings of the Board of Directors, indicate that the running costs of the Trust are being maintained at levels within the allocation of resources.
5. Insurances for the voluntary grammar schools and the Trust, as negotiated with the insurers and brokers, are in place. Insurances for the catholic maintained schools are organised through CCMS and the Education Authority.
6. The Finance and Resources Committee has maintained Employment Policies and Procedures which have been adopted by the Board of Directors.
7. The Department of Education pays grant aid for capital works. The Trust, having paid consultants, builders and suppliers, returns receipts to the Department. The total amount of monies, grant-aided by the Department of Education, for works in our schools this last year, was £690,106

SCHOOL	PAID
St. Patricks PS	£284,196
All Saints College	£300,077
Edmund Rice College	£28,998
St. Mary's CBGS	£24,013
CBS Armagh PS	£41,418
Abbey CBGS	£ NIL
Omagh CBGS	£ NIL
John Paul 11 PS	£11,404
TOTAL	£690,106

- **St Patrick's Primary School**

The building of the new St Patrick's, Churchill St, Belfast, including the adjacent car parking and sporting facilities, was recently completed.

- **All Saints College**

All Saints College continues to use two sites, the former CBS site on the Glen Road and the former St Rose's site, Beechmount. Planning is continuing to identify sites and design for a new build.

- **Edmund Rice College**

The Department of Education has announced the intention to replace the Edmund Rice College, Glengormley with a new build.

- **St Mary's CBGS**

The Department of Education continues to plan for the building of a new gymnasium.

8. The Strategic Plan has been evaluated and a draft plan for 23-26 is currently being developed.

9. As per Article 64 of the Memorandum and Articles of the Trust:

"The Board shall undertake, at least once in every five years, an evaluation of the performance of the Company by reference to the attainment of the main objects and to the promotion of the ideals outlined within the Charter."

This company review was completed in June '22. The independently created report was very positive on all aspects of the company's performance.

CONCLUSION

All of the schools, under the auspices of the Trust, have performed very well in terms of their curriculum offerings and their commitment to the Edmund Rice Ethos.

Because of the pandemic, the school communities are facing great challenges but are managing exceptionally well. The Trust will continue to support the schools as best as possible.

The reputation of the Trust within the Catholic Sector, and in the wider educational arena in Northern Ireland, continues to be strong.

Links and cooperation with other Edmund Rice schools and organisations, locally and worldwide, are continuing to strengthen.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the ongoing work of the Executive Officer, Mr Seán Sloan, ably assisted by the Administrative Officer, Mrs Andrea Irwin.