



EDMUND RICE SCHOOLS TRUST (NI) LTD

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

22nd October 2024

ANNUAL REPORT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

For period ending 31 August 2024

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 Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors relates to the activities of the Board for the period 1 September 2023- 31 August 2024.

MEMBERS 2023 - 2024

Chair Mr John Cooley

Vice-Chair Mr Roddy Tierney

Members Br Denis Gleeson, Mr Gerry Scannell, Mr John McGettrick,
Mrs Diane Russell.
Mr Raymond Hunter & Mrs Alice Phoenix (from June). Mr
Aidan McCormick

DIRECTORS 2023 - 2024

Chair Mr Dermot McGovern

Directors Mrs Donna Tohill, Mr John Devine, Mr Micheál Martin,
Mr Eddie McArdle, Mr James Murray.

COMPANY SECRETARY Mr Paul Shevlin

EXECUTIVE OFFICE Mr Seán Sloan

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 2023 - August 2024)

SCHOOL POPULATION 2023/2024						
School	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	TEACHERS	OTHER	POPULATION
			PUPILS		STAFF	
Abbey CBGS	906	0	906	55	57	1018
Omagh CBGS	946	0	946	61	65	1072
St. Mary's CBGS	1200	0	1200	78	74	1352
All Saints College	552	280	832	63	89	984
Edmund Rice College	489	361	850	57	70	977
Armagh PS	316	259	575	31	39	645
St Patrick's PS	217	215	432	25	50	507
John Paul II	152	171	323	16	33	372
	4778	1286	6064	386	477	6927

The Trust welcomes 2 new principals to their schools:

- St Mary's Grammar, Belfast – Mr B McComb
- All Saints College, Belfast. - Mr D. Coyle.

We wish Mrs B Farrimond and Mrs Siobhan Kelly best wishes in their retirements.

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 2023-2024 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 2024-2025 was carried out in Westcourt on 28th August 2024 by S.Sloan with input from Mr Raymond Hunter and Mr Eddie McArdle. 16 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. Through discussion with Principals, new teacher induction will take the format over 2 years with Day 1 and Day 2 taking place in August over the 2 year period. E.g. Day 1 28th August 2024, Day 2 25th August 2025
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.

The Trust will liaise with Primary School Principals to agree a future model for 2025-2026.

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 and EA has now commenced Mental Health initiatives to replace this.

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. The Trust will participate in the N.I Assembly led scoping inquiry in N.I. A prepared statement will be available in advance. The Trust has discussed the nature with its Principals.

5. School activities, including Immersion Programme and Edmund Rice Summer School, have returned following the pandemic. All our schools are involved in local social justice initiatives. Abbey CBGS returned to Livingston Zambia in March 2024. Edmund Rice College intend visiting Lusaka in June 2025 and have funded a library with a BOG member visiting in July 2024 accompanied by teachers. Omagh CBS co-ordinate volunteers to take part in an ER Summer Camp. This took place in July 2024.

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. 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 and EREBB leadership Symposium in April 2024. Ongoing work is underway to develop collaborative projects within The European Chapter.

7. As schools work towards re-establishing normality post Covid it was logistically not possible to hold the ER Awards this year. Social Justice Projects are still at a relatively early stage with exam pressures in post primary schools a major disrupting factor.

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 and discussed with principals. This has now been printed. Training will begin with the 3 Voluntary Grammar schools during December 2024, with the remaining schools to be completed before June 2025. Guidance will be distributed to each school then.

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, while originally suspended, has now been enacted.
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 has been completed. The target date for completion is 2028 or as soon as possible thereafter. Work will commence in November 2024
6. The development of archival and historical records for the Trust and schools is ongoing.
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; All pre-2008 school records have been deposited with PRONI and Marino Library.

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, Dr Éamonn Phoenix RIP, former founding Chair of Members 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 nineths 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. This is now underway with John Paul II the last school to reconstitute.
10. The Trust noted with concern that the recent Principal 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. A MOU was submitted to CCMS concerning all staff appointments.
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. During 2024-25 academic year, 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 sixth Annual Monitoring Return to the Charities Commission in April 2024.

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 fourteenth year of financial operations was presented at the Annual General Meeting in October 2023.

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. The policy was reviewed and amended December 2023 with further amendments December 2024.
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 £730,339.

SCHOOL	PAID
St. Patricks PS	£6,456
All Saints College	£173,379
Edmund Rice College	£409,771
St. Mary's CBGS	£110,430
CBS Armagh PS	£29,936
Abbey CBGS	£ NIL
Omagh CBGS	£ NIL
John Paul 11 PS	£367
TOTAL	£730,339

- **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 with the Cross and Passion site, Glen road chosen. The Business Case has now been accepted with a new build proposed for completion for 2028 with new sports facilities on the Glen Rd CBS site.

- **Edmund Rice College**

The Department of Education has announced the intention to replace the Edmund Rice College, Glengormley with a new build. The project team has been launched with bi-monthly meetings commenced in Oct '24

- **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.