

Mr. Marcus Ó'Léanacháin
Chairperson of Board of Management
Gaelscoil na Giúise
Ionad Pobal Theach na Giúise
Céide Bhaile Uí Chuilinn
Teach na Giúise
Baile Átha Cliath 24

18th November 2014

Marcus, a chara,

In relation to your recent query I wish to advise that the Department of Education and Skills has consistently stated that the acquisition of sites in Firhouse/Oldbawn for Firhouse Educate Together NS and Gaelscoil Teach na Giúise is an imperative. This is the community that the schools have been set up to serve (indeed, as reflected in their names) and this is where they must be located to meet the needs of that community.

The lands that have been reserved for schools within the boundary of the Ballycullen/Oldcourt Local Area Plan lands will serve a different purpose. The Department has also, therefore, repeatedly stated that it will not be delivering educational infrastructure in Ballycullen/Oldcourt beyond the need generated specifically by housing developments in that area. This is because it is a separate and distinct school feeder area ultimately having its own needs. In any event, regardless of whether or not additional lands are reserved for schools in that area, it is neither desirable nor logical from the Department's perspective to try to meet the educational needs of one community by placing its primary schools in another community. This mitigates against the sustainability of a community. It is also unfair to expect the host community to carry a heavy concentration of school buildings, which are unnecessary for its own requirements.

Apart from the obvious loss to the Firhouse/Oldbawn community of state-of-the-art educational facilities for generations of its children and wider public use, providing this community's schools in Oldcourt/Ballycullen would carry many potential difficulties that would not be easily resolved.

Needlessly drawing traffic into Oldcourt/Ballycullen would create problems to be resolved by the local authority. In this regard, it must be taken into consideration that the total enrolment in both schools will be some 900 pupils when fully developed. It can be reasonably expected that resolving the attendant traffic issues, if this is possible, would come at a cost to the local authority.

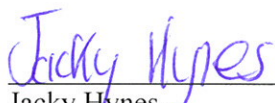
To expect very young children to travel outside of their own community for primary school provision in the first place is contrary to the Department's school planning policy and contrary to the legitimate expectations of parents of school provision in their own area.

School provision is made on the basis of orderly planning with a basic underlying tenet which is to provide schools to meet demographic demands in specific geographic areas. This is consistent with national sustainable planning and travel policy. This approach also recognises the widely held view that schools are community cornerstones that contribute to inclusivity and cohesiveness within a community by virtue of the added value their facilities bring.

On this basis, it remains the Department's firm position that the educational needs of the Firhouse/Oldbawn school feeder area must be met within that area. It is also the Department's firm position that the lands in the Ballycullen/Oldcourt area do not provide a solution for the needs of the Firhouse/Oldbawn school-going community. The Department re-iterates its position that the educational needs of the Ballycullen/Oldcourt school feeder will be addressed as a separate matter as and when they arise.

The Department is of the view that in holding this position it is being consistent with its approach to the delivery of new schools for communities on a national basis and that this approach is in accordance with the efforts being made by local authorities in relation to both sustainable planning and travel smart community strategies.

Le meas,



Jacky Hynes,
Assistant Principal,
Forward Planning Section.