

*At Scoil na Naomh Uilig we are all equal.  
We learn together, we play together,  
we pray and we grow together.*

*"Uile le Chéile"*



*Scoil na Naomh Uilig*  
Rickardstown, Newbridge, Co. Kildare  
Tel: 045 434853 Fax: 045 435026  
[office@scoilnanaomhuilig.ie](mailto:office@scoilnanaomhuilig.ie)

## Consultation on the role of Religion in Schools Admissions

### Board of Management Submission

A meeting of the Board of Management took place on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2017 to discuss and prepare this submission.

**Name of School:** Scoil na Naomh Uilig

**Address :** Rickardstown, Newbridge, Co. Kildare

**Type of School:** Catholic Primary School

**Patron:** Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin

**Number of Pupils:** 556

**Number of Teachers:** 38

**Number of Special Needs Assistants:** 24

**Catchment Area:** Current school population - 526 Greater Newbridge Area; 40 outside Newbridge. Scoil na Naomh Uilig is one of seven catholic primary schools in the parish of Newbridge. Administration of admissions to these schools is overseen by a central applications committee. There is also a Church of Ireland school, an Educate Together school and a Gaelscoil.

**What it means to us to be a Catholic school:** To the leaders, staff and management of Scoil na Naomh Uilig being Catholic does not mean being one-dimensional. The Board of Management is privileged to oversee and support the holistic development of all children, in addition to supporting the faith development of the school's Catholic children including their preparation for communion and confirmation and their participation in the celebration of various Catholic feasts and activities. Every effort is made to ensure that such activities do not infringe on the rights of non-catholic children. Any suggestion that the rights of catholic children are prioritised to the exclusion of others is unjust. Our ethos is an ethos of respect and inclusivity informed by the teachings of Christ. Scoil na Naomh Uilig as an inclusive school was acknowledged as a model of best practice in our WSE report 2015. All children from whatever faith, ethnic, or socio-economic background are welcomed and cherished.

**Inclusion:** Scoil na Naomh Uilig is an inclusive school which provides education for children of all abilities including children with autism and children with severe and profound disabilities, pupils from all socio-economic backgrounds, pupils from 32 different ethnic backgrounds, pupils of 6 different religions including 504 Catholics and 15 with no religion recorded. We have three non-Catholic children from outside Newbridge. The school has five special classes – three for children with autism which can cater for a maximum of 18 pupils and two classes for pupils with severe and profound physical and learning disabilities which can cater for a maximum of twelve pupils.

**Baptism:** Baptism is **not** a requirement to attend this school. Places are offered to children who fulfil the age requirement using the following criteria and in the following order:-

1. Siblings of children attending the school
2. Children of staff in the school
3. Children living in the Newbridge area
4. Catholic children from neighbouring parishes who do not have a place in a Catholic school in their own parish area.

(Extracted from school's Admission Policy)

*Principal:* Noreen Duggan

*Deputy Principal:* Valerie Kavanagh

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**Level of subscription:** While a number of schools mostly in Dublin are over subscribed most Catholic schools are not and so rarely refuse admission to any child. Scoil na Naomh Uilig is a relatively new school and to date has not been oversubscribed for admission to mainstream classes. However it is very much oversubscribed in terms of applications for special classes. Applications for mainstream classes are likely to increase so that in years to come oversubscription may become an issue.

**Oversubscription:** While Scoil na Naomh Uilig is not experiencing oversubscription to date for mainstream classes, the issue has manifested itself in some of the Newbridge parish schools. The central applications committee made up of the principals of all seven catholic parish schools and the parish priest has managed to address the issue to the satisfaction of the vast majority of families in the parish. At no stage does any religion take priority over the rights of a child from within the parish. The issue of oversubscription for places in special classes is currently a very serious problem. Scoil na Naomh Uilig can only cater for one of thirteen children that applied for places in a class for pupils with autism for September 2017. Other schools in the parish are in the process of setting up special classes but places in these may not come on stream until 2018. In the meantime parents of children with autism who cannot get places in Scoil na Naomh Uilig have suggested that instead they will apply to have their children enrolled in mainstream classes. Such an arrangement without the availability of proper resources can only have an adverse outcome for the children involved and an adverse effect on teaching and learning in such mainstream classes.

**Prioritising children from Catholic families!:** The Board of Management wishes to point out that the rights of children living within the parish of Newbridge take precedence over the rights of Catholic children from outside the parish. In the event that oversubscription in the parish as a whole should arise and should there be an inability on the part of the Central Applications Committee to cater for all children then the Board of Management of Scoil na Naomh Uilig would reserve the right to prioritise Catholic children in order to maintain the ethos of the school. Members of the board feel very strongly however that the solution to the problem of oversubscription in such circumstances is the provision of extra school places. Without such provision the rights of children from whatever background are not being addressed.

## **Four Options in Consultation Document**

**Option 1 – Catchment Area:** This would be the **preferred option of the Board of Management of Scoil na Naomh Uilig.** The seven parish primary schools in Newbridge are dotted around the parish. This is the option that we feel gives parents the greatest level of choice. Parents apply through the parish office to have their children enrolled in the school of their choice by listing their preferences 1,2,3, etc. Such preference may be governed by proximity to a particular school, or because siblings are already in the school or for other valid reasons. As all seven schools are within the parish it is generally resolved to the satisfaction of the vast majority of families. It also ensures that pupils in each school come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Option 2- Nearest school rule:** This option is not favoured by the Board of Management. It shares the view agreed by the CPSMA that “*it would require a complex and cumbersome set of rules to determine school distances, routes, starting and arrival points etc*”. *It would also limit parental choice.* In Newbridge because the catchment area for mainstream classes is the parish, the Nearest School Rule is not required.

**Option 3 - Quota system:** The inference in the consultation document that religion is the cause of most problems in respect of shortcomings in admissions policies in Catholic schools is not borne out by the facts. A survey sent to 456 oversubscribed Catholic primary schools in the greater Dublin area produced the following results from the 384 that replied. Only 17 schools (4.4%) refused admission for a reason relating to baptism. In these schools there were a total of 26,968 applications for 19,218 places. Only 1.2% of applications that did not result in enrolments could be attributed to baptism issues (CPMSA Survey). The fact remains that the main reason why pupils were refused admission was not a baptism

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issue but an issue of resources with 26,968 pupils applying for 19,218 places. A quota system does not produce more places

**Option 4. Outright prohibition:** This final option which proposes the removal in whole or in part of clause 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act places a prohibition on religious primary schools using religion as a factor in admissions which would mean that all places would be allocated based on other factors. As already pointed out in this submission this is what is already happening in most schools. Scoil na Naomh Uilig gives priority to the children of Newbridge irrespective of religion, socio-economic background, ethnic background, intellectual ability etc.

It is the opinion of the Board of Management of Scoil na Naomh Uilig that much of the impetus for revision of admission policies is driven by pressure groups, many of whom are motivated by anti-catholic bias and have the ultimate goal of secularising all schools. Where there is pressure for places due to oversubscription the problem has nothing to do with religion. The solution is the provision of extra places and not who should or should not be prioritised.

*Minority schools: According to the CPSMA “All four options above would have a significant impact on minority faith schools and may result in them being unable to maintain their ethos in any meaningful sense. They are also generally smaller schools and consequently risk oversubscription far quicker than larger schools – this is a particularly acute problem for Protestant Schools in areas of high population growth.*

*The Ministers’ proposals will fundamentally undermine the provision of faith based education for minority faiths. The proposals could have the effect of forcing a minority faith school to deny a pupil of that faith access to a school specifically set up to provide a specific ethos and to accommodate that pupil in order to accommodate another pupil even where there are other faith or non-faith schools available. Consequently, the Minister’s measures would introduce a new injustice and unfairness to Irish education where children, particularly of minority faiths, are excluded from schools of their own ethos”*

The Board of Management of Scoil na Naomh Uilig would agree with this assessment.

In summary, as a board we believe that the admissions policies in faith based schools are not the source of the problem of pupils failing to find school places. We hope that the views above will be taken on board in the drawing up of new proposals.

James Mullooly,  
Chairperson,  
BOM Scoil na Naomh Uilig.

Noreen Duggan  
Secretary,  
BOM Scoil na Naomh Uilig.