



# The Provision of Schools and the Planning System

A Code of Practice  
for  
Planning Authorities,  
the Department of Education and Science,  
and  
the Department of the Environment,  
Heritage and Local Government



July 2008



Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

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# Ministerial Foreword

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The education system is a fundamental foundation stone of Ireland's social and economic development. The availability of good quality and life-long education is essential in facilitating the emergence of a knowledge-driven and innovative society and economy.

The Government is determined that Ireland's education system continues to develop and improve on its already high standards of educational attainment and that it continues to meet the new challenges of our society's fast growing and more diverse needs. To this end, these new guidelines are being issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, and come into effect immediately on publication. Planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to these guidelines in carrying out their functions.

Ireland's rapidly growing population continues to present new challenges in meeting the needs of all children including those in new communities in relation to planning and development and the provision of necessary physical and social infrastructure. The planning system, for its part, plays a critical role in anticipating future development and co-ordinating the provision of the essential supporting infrastructure such as transport, water services, schools, amenity and community facilities through the actions of the planning authorities, the investment programmes of Government Departments and their agencies and through the private sector.

The Government has put in place an array of initiatives to promote proper planning and sustainable development and the effective co-ordination of development and infrastructure, from the National Spatial Strategy and National Development Plan 2007-2013 to the Developing Areas Initiative of the Departments of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and Education and Science. Major public investment has been identified for the education sector through the NDP and both Departments are working hard to secure the effective co-ordination of development and schools provision.

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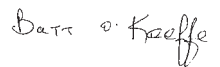
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This document is part of a wider package of initiatives designed to facilitate the provision of schools, particularly primary schools, and schools related infrastructure within the planning system coupled to new mechanisms for site identification and acquisition.

We appreciate the commitment of the City and County Managers Association to this process and urge planning authorities to implement these guidelines in the knowledge that Government is strongly committed to comprehensively tackling the issue of schools provision in a strategic manner, especially in high growth areas.



John Gormley T.D.  
Minister for the Environment,  
Heritage and Local Government



Batt O'Keeffe T.D.  
Minister for Education  
and Science



Michael Finneran T.D.  
Minister for Housing,  
Urban Renewal &  
Developing Areas

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# Providing Schools – The Task Ahead

This Code of Practice sets out best practice approaches that should be followed by planning authorities in ensuring that the planning system plays its full part in facilitating the timely and cost-effective roll-out of school facilities by the Department of Education and Science and in line with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

Complementing and expanding on previous planning guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) in 2007 on the preparation of development plans (2007)<sup>1</sup>, these guidelines also include details of how:

- (i) the Department of Education and Science will support the work of planning authorities in their planning functions, and
- (ii) planning authorities can complement and build on such interaction through site identification and acquisition.

Ireland's growing population indicates that the primary school-going population will increase by about 100,000 pupils between now and 2013. The actual number of classrooms required for this period will depend on such factors as the spread of the additional pupils and the capacity of existing schools to meet this demand. The emerging spatial pattern of primary schooling needs reflects the distribution of rapidly developing residential areas within the various Gateways and Hubs identified in the National Spatial Strategy and other locations, especially those close to Dublin.



<sup>1</sup> Document available to view and download at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,14468,en.pdf>

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The main focus of the Department of Education and Science's capital programme is to modernise existing schools and to cater for areas of rapid growth and these guidelines therefore focus on this issue.

Ireland's rapidly growing population has created new challenges for planning authorities and the Department of Education and Science in meeting emerging demands for school places in fast growing and urbanising parts of Ireland. These challenges include:

- the pace of development in new urbanising parts of the Gateways identified in the National Spatial Strategy which is necessary to meet housing needs and support strategic and plan-led development;
- changing demographic patterns with high levels of net migration into Ireland and a trend towards migration of young families creating immediate demands for additional school places; and
- identifying and making available suitable sites for new schools in a timely manner, integrated with new residential development and at reasonable cost.

Under the National Development Plan 2007-2013, almost €4.5 billion will be invested in first- and second-level schools infrastructure with a key focus on the provision of additional school places in fast developing areas. Pro-active planning in the identification and delivery of sites for new primary and post-primary schools within the physical planning process will be vital in securing good value for money in terms of site acquisition costs.



# Key Principles, Roles and Responsibilities

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Effective integration of the schools and development planning systems has three core objectives:

- (1) Schools provision should be an integral part of the evolution of compact sustainable urban development and the development of sustainable communities;
- (2) The provision of any new schools (both primary and post-primary) should be driven by and emerge from an integrated approach between the planning functions of planning authorities and the Department of Education and Science; and
- (3) Local authorities, as planning authorities, will support and assist the Department in ensuring the timely provision of school sites.

The legislative and policy framework for planning facilitates the achievement of the objectives outlined above by placing considerable importance on the timely and effective provision for school facilities. Section 10(2)(l) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires that a development plan shall include objectives for:

*"the provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including, in particular, schools, crèches and other education and childcare facilities."*

The procedures to be adopted by planning authorities in integrating schools planning issues into their development planning processes are outlined in the Planning Guidelines on Development Plans (DEHLG, 2007). In the context of strengthening communities, the draft Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (DEHLG, February 2008)<sup>2</sup> draw particular attention to the need to plan for future schools needs and timely consultation with the Department of Education and Science. The Guidelines state that no substantial residential development should proceed without an assessment of existing schools capacity or the provision of new school facilities in tandem with the development.

They also stress that planning authorities should strive to phase development in line with the availability of essential social and community infrastructure such as schools, amenities and other facilities.

The following principles and responsibilities underpin the co-operative efforts to plan for and provide education facilities:

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<sup>2</sup> Available to view and download at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,16691,en.pdf>



- Planning authorities play a central role in securing the proper planning and development of their areas, harnessing the combination of their local knowledge and the support of central Government Departments and their agencies.
- The planning authorities and the Department of Education and Science must work closely and co-operatively in planning for and providing new primary and post-primary schools in a timely and cost-efficient manner, building on the substantial Government commitment under the National Development Plan 2007-2013.
- Taking due account of the most recent regional population projections prepared inter alia by CSO and under the NSS and Regional Planning Guidelines by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in February 2007, and the consequent planning authority allocation within each region, planning authorities and the Department of Education and Science should work closely together in forecasting future demand for schools, taking account of reasonable estimates of future development based on development plans, local area plans and any other planning policies or initiatives.
- The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has streamlined certain aspects of the exempted development regulations with



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regard to schools and school-related development to ensure the timely provision of school facilities.

- Through its Developing Areas Initiative, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government continues to monitor strategic infrastructure requirements, including schools, in fast growing residential development areas across the country.
- The two Departments and planning authorities must continue to work together and liaise with other Departments and agencies in ensuring effective co-ordination of new development with the provision of all necessary infrastructure, and in monitoring the experiences in operating the schools site identification and acquisition process.



# Agreed Actions

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The following actions have been agreed by the two Departments and the planning authorities to implement these principles.

## 1. Forecasting Future Education Demand

The Department of Education and Science will:

- Implement the overall national school building programme under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 focusing in particular on the needs of developing areas supported by effective forecasting and planning mechanisms within the Department and from local authorities as to the demand for new school places.
- Identify future primary school demands, based on:
  - o the anticipated increase in overall population for the city/county plan area over the next nine years (as set out in the local authority development plan/local area plan and housing strategy)<sup>3</sup>;
  - o the current school-going population based on school returns;
  - o the increase in school-going population, assuming that an average of 12% of the population are expected to present for primary education; and
  - o the number of classrooms required in total derived from the above.
- Supply estimates of future accommodation requirements arising from new development to planning authorities as part of the consultation processes for the preparation of development plans, local area plans, planning schemes for Strategic Development Zones and other relevant planning frameworks.
- Develop a comprehensive Geographical Information System (GIS) for school planning purposes which will be capable of holding data on school locations, capacities, demographic trends and analyses of need.
- Engage with planning authorities at the earliest stage in a planning application so that initial feedback and assessments can be made and feedback given.

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<sup>3</sup> Taking account of the National Population Projections and Regional Population Targets 2006-2020 (DEHLG February 2007) as disaggregated at county level by the Regional Authorities; and the population projections produced by the Central Statistics Office (see [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)).

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The procedure for establishing demand for new second-level schools may in some cases be more complex as it involves not just an assessment of likely population growth but also an appraisal of the capacity of existing post-primary schools, coupled with an assessment of the enrolment patterns in existing and anticipated 'feeder' national schools. It is envisaged that, while the initial levels of interaction between the Department of Education and Science and local authorities will be predominately but not exclusively targeted at primary schools provision reflecting demographic trends into the future, it is intended that as this Code of Practice becomes more firmly established further procedures will be put in place in relation to post-primary provision.

Planning authorities, in support of the above aims, will:

- Make available in a timely fashion and insofar as possible reasonable estimates of future development potential within their areas through the development plan and local area plan processes and in a manner consistent with broader national and regional estimates of growth contained in the NSS and Regional Planning Guidelines.

## **2. Planning for New Schools through Local Authority Development Plans**

Planning authorities will:

- Anticipate the demand for new schools infrastructure that will arise from new development within the drafting process for development plans and local area plans using the Department of Education and Science approach outlined above, and through these plans, will facilitate the identification of suitable lands to meet the need for new schools or expansion of existing schools to serve new or expanding communities.
- Consult at an early stage of plan preparation regarding the approach to schools provision with the Forward Planning Unit of the Department of Education and Science and local school providers.
- Work closely with the Site Acquisitions and Property Management Unit of the Department of Education and Science in assessing specific land requirements for schools, including the assessment of the suitability of particular sites, thereby ensuring an agreed basis for schools provision in the development plan and local area plan processes.

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The Department of Education and Science will:

- Collaborate with planning authorities in finalising the appropriate policies and objectives, including objectives with regard to sites for new schools, to be inserted into development plans and local area plans.

Planning authorities will:

- In the course of considering the zoning of previously unzoned land for development within the development plan process, engage with landowners / developers to identify suitable sites for new schools or other facilities to be made available for the benefit of the community.

### **3. Location of Schools – Planning Considerations**

The Department of Education and Science will:

- Publish from time to time specific recommendations and standards with regard to suitable locations for schools, including general site development standards.

Planning authorities will:

- Ensure that school sites are fit for purpose in terms of their location, access to services and the provision of space for recreational and sports activities which can help to support an effective learning and development environment for children, in line with the Department of Education and Science requirements.
- Seek to situate new schools within the existing/proposed catchment in a manner that aids ease of access from surrounding areas and encourages sustainable mobility by walking, cycling and public transport.
- Insofar as possible, reserve lands for educational purposes in locations close to the areas of greatest residential expansion and adjacent to community developments such as community centres, playing fields, libraries etc. so that the possibility of sharing facilities can be maximised.
- Following the identification / reservation of suitable sites, initiate immediate contact with the Department of Education and Science to clarify the suitability of the site (having regard to that Department's site standards) and the timeframe for acquisition of the site.

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The Department of Education and Science will:

- Consider the use of multi-campus schooling arrangements in appropriate cases, e.g. 2 or 3 schools side by side; a primary and a post-primary school sharing a site; schools anchoring wider social and community facilities required in the same area.

#### **4. Site Development Standards**

Having identified the scale of additional accommodation required within a development plan or local area plan area, the question will then arise as to specific site requirements for additional school accommodation. Generally speaking, the minimum size for a new primary school is 8 classrooms. In rapidly developing areas this minimum may be as high as 16 classrooms.

Current details of site norms, sizes, shapes may be amended from time to time by the Department of Education and Science to reflect on-going practice (see Technical Guidance document TGD-025 on the Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Primary Schools - September 2007, which is available to view and download on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) ).

Planning authorities will generally base their approach in assessing school site requirements on the Department of Education and Science's site standards referred to above as well as taking into account other urban design and sustainable development considerations.



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In general, a typical new 8-classroom primary school will comprise:

- 8 classrooms with en suite toilet,
- specialist rooms,
- General Purpose room for PE facilities and ancillary accommodation (stores, toilets etc.),
- Library,
- Principal's office and an administration and staff room area, and
- external hard and soft play areas.

Design solutions need to take account of the development context, whether greenfield suburban locations or more urban locations are involved. The Department of Education and Science has developed a number of modular and standardised design solutions to the varying needs of different types of sites.

Sites identified by planning authorities in their development plans should generally conform to the Department of Education and Science requirements. Where any questions arise within planning authorities as to site suitability, they should be referred to the Site Acquisitions and Property Management Unit in the Department for confirmation of suitability before the site is reserved or purchased by the local authority.



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## **5. School Development Proposals and the Development Management Process**

Planning authorities will:

- Prioritise requests for pre-planning discussions with the Department of Education and Science and school promoters/authorities to ensure an efficient processing of school planning applications.
- Progress school planning applications through the development management process as efficiently as possible. With school planning issues and sites resolved within the development plan process, the planning application should represent the capping of the planning process, apart from the working out of fine detail regarding site-specific development and compliance with other standards in the development plan/local area plan.
- Take due account of the requirements of section 4.4 of the draft planning guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, which requires planning applications for major housing proposals to be accompanied by assessments of the capacity of local schools to accommodate the proposed development.
- Implement the Planning and Development Regulations 2008 on exempted development for temporary school facilities and school extensions to expedite the provision of minor school development works and temporary school facilities.

The Department of Education and Science will:

- Ensure that any applications for outline planning permission contain adequate information regarding access, drainage and general site layout in order to enable planning authorities to satisfactorily assess such applications.
- Work closely with planning authorities in ensuring that temporary school buildings permitted by way of the exempted development regulations are properly provided with adequate access, drainage and traffic management measures.

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## **6. School Site Identification and Acquisition**

### **Background**

Until relatively recently, schools were constructed on land provided by patron bodies (the patrons were in the vast majority of cases the ecclesiastical authorities) and the property was owned by the patron. Since 1999, the Department of Education and Science has moved to a model of site purchase and the lease of the building subsequently constructed to the patron.

It is anticipated that the acquisition of sites for schools will continue apace in the coming years.

### **Co-ordination and Co-operation between the Department of Education and Science and Local Authorities**

The Department of Education and Science is responsible for planning and developing schools. Local authorities, as planning authorities, will co-operate and co-ordinate with the Department in ensuring the timely provision of school places.

It is Government policy that local authorities shall, in the performance of their functions concerning the provision of sites for schools, have regard to the policies of the Minister for Education and Science and shall co-operate and co-ordinate with the Department in relation to the transfer of sites to the Department.

To this end, the Department of Education and Science will meet in full the costs incurred by local authorities in pursuit of these objectives.

The modalities relating to site ownership and funding of same will be agreed between the Department of Education and Science and the City and County Managers' Association.

### **Review Mechanism**

Experience in the operation of the new site identification and acquisition process will be reviewed by a monitoring committee consisting of representatives of the two Departments and the City and County Managers' Association.



# Appendix 1

## Contact Points in the Department of Education and Science

Forward Planning		Telephone	Email
Tony Dalton	Principal	057 932 4458	Tony_Dalton@education.gov.ie
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Mary Colohan	Higher Exec Office	057 932 4433	Mary_Colohan@education.gov.ie
Grace O'Malley	Higher Exec Office	057 932 4433	Grace_O'Malley@education.gov.ie

Site Acquisition & Property Management		Telephone	Email
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John Doyle	Assistant Principal	057 932 4350	John_Doyle@education.gov.ie
Julie Cleary	Higher Exec Office	057 932 4455	Julie_Cleary@education.gov.ie