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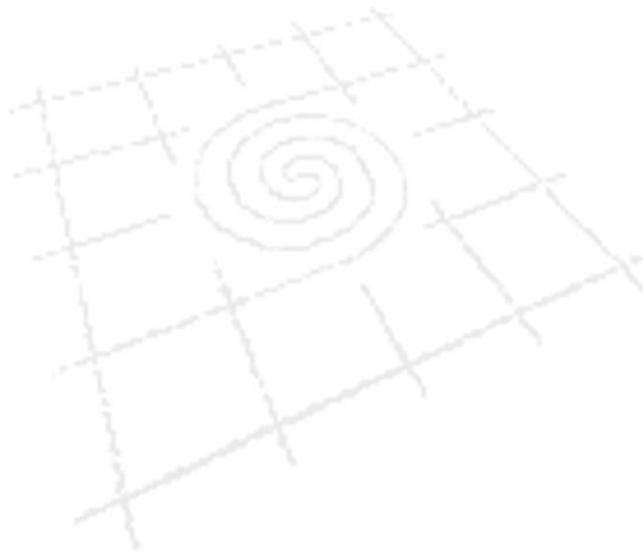
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Strategic Spatial Planning and the Provision of Schools: A Case Study of Cross-Sectoral Policy Coordination in the Dublin City-Region

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1. Introduction

This paper addresses the actual and potential role of strategic spatial planning in the context of educational infrastructure provision. Specifically, the paper focuses on the planning and provision of primary schools in the Dublin city-region in the context of rapid demographic and social change. The recent economic boom period has been accompanied by a rapid pace of population growth and significant shifts in the demographic composition of society in Ireland and the Dublin city-region, in particular. The analytical focus on planning for the provision of schools constitutes a critical case study of strategic spatial planning in practice. In particular, planning for school provision represents a policy domain where coordination between spatial planning and sectoral policy (i.e. education) functions is required in order to ensure the planning and provision of infrastructure to service the needs of expanding urban and peri-urban residential communities. Although, in most cases, schools are not required for development to proceed¹, the need for additional school places may be particularly acute where residential development is accompanied by in-migration of households with a younger than average age profile and high proportion of young children. This paper outlines the challenges and problems associated with the practice of planning primary school provision in the Dublin city-region as well as critically assessing specific policy measures that have been introduced with the objective of improving the capacity of the state to respond to the need for new schools in areas of urban and peri-urban expansion. The analysis in this paper draws on qualitative interviews conducted by the author in 2008 and 2009².

2. Social Service Provision in Ireland: Church, State and Society

A number of commentators have noted a pronounced but partial shift towards secularism and multiculturalism in Irish society as Irish society has become increasingly diverse (Peillon & Corcoran, 2004, Kitchin & Bartley, 2007, Glendenning, 2008, Fanning, 2009). The response of the state to the challenges and opportunities of social and cultural diversity has varied between a rhetoric of integration and practices which serve to increase and legitimise social segregation (Bacik, 2004, Fanning, 2004, 2007). A report of the OECD on education policy in Ireland, published in 1991

¹ Strategic Development Zones (i.e. Adamstown, South Dublin) and a number of recent Local Area Plans contain provisions for phasing of development, requiring schools to be provided prior to or in tandem with residential development.

² See Walsh, C. Chapter 4 (forthcoming) for further details on the research design and methodology employed.

identified the emergence of pluralism and the 'beginnings of multiculturalism' in Ireland, but contended that in contrast to other industrialised countries Irish society continued to be characterised by a distinctive national culture:

In spite of the rapid pace of its economic development in recent times, Ireland has preserved a distinctive national culture and traditional moral values and mores to a degree not found in many other industrialised countries (OECD, 1991, 22-23).

More recently Mac Einri (2007, 214) has noted that along with other countries of the European periphery such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Ireland has experienced a transition in recent decades from a strong tradition of emigration to a new phase as a receiving society, 'experiencing, substantial, diverse and ongoing inward migration'. He suggests that these countries tend to lack the institutional, discursive and material structures to support a multi-cultural society which have developed in other European countries with longer traditions of in-migration and socio-cultural diversity. The experience and implications of social change in Ireland have been compounded by a significant decline in the influence of traditional institutions of moral and political authority. In particular the influence of the Roman Catholic (RC) Church in wider society has declined very significantly, over recent decades and more recently as a response to revelations in relation to the institutionalised abuse of children and young adults within the care of the RC religious orders.

The RC Church has traditionally played a very significant role in the provision of social services including the formulation of social policy in Ireland. The RC Church continues to play a very significant role in relation to the provision of education and healthcare in particular (OECD, 1991, Drudy & Lynch, 1993, Bacik, 2004, O' Toole, 2007). Drudy and Lynch (1993) have argued that the Catholic Church derives significant ideological benefits from its involvement in the provision of primary and second level education in Ireland, while the principal benefits to the State are financial, in terms of reduced management, administration and capital costs. They further note that the various Churches represent the largest formally recognised lobby group in the Department of Education with strong representation on all decision-making and consultative bodies (1993,79). The OECD (1991) similarly identified the extent of the power and influence of the RC Church in relation to the provision of education:

The State would not contemplate subverting the authority of the Church in educational matters... Change is only feasible through discreet negotiations and an unspoken search for consensus... (OECD, 1991, 41)

Traditionally, the vast majority of schools in Ireland have been provided by religious authorities. The structure of the primary education system in particular can be traced to developments in the 19th century, which saw the emergence of an overwhelmingly denominational system. A National Board of Education was established in 1831, with the intention of promoting the development of a multi-denominational system of primary education, supported by the state (the UK government). Opposition and lack of cooperation from the Catholic hierarchy and religious orders, however, led to a situation where the new Irish State to inherit a system of denominational education in 1922 (Coolahan, 1981, Curry, 2003). Regulations for national schools published by the Department of Education in 1965 gave explicit recognition to the 'denominational character' of the primary schools

in Ireland (Department of Education, 1965, 8). Although the legal principle of a separation of Church and State has been accepted in Ireland since 1871, the education sector has remained a notable exception.

Legislation introduced in 1998, preserved and gave statutory recognition to the system of 'patronage', whereby schools are obliged to uphold the ethos of their patron. Recent statistics indicate that 98% of primary schools in the State are denominational schools, 94% of which are run by the Roman Catholic Church and associated religious orders (Glendenning, 2008, 296). Religious minorities, account for less than 200 primary schools (mostly Church of Ireland although Methodist, Jewish, Muslim and Quaker schools have also been established). Recent statements on education policy by the RC Church hierarchy stress a commitment to the provision of Catholic schools for Catholic children, and that while non-Catholic children are welcome, this is dependent on the availability of school places and resources:

The Catholic Church is committed to providing Catholic schools to cater for the needs of parents who wish their children to have a Catholic education. Therefore the children of Catholic parents have first claim on admission to Catholic schools. Wherever possible, in keeping with their ethos, and provided that they have places and resources, Catholic schools welcome children of other faiths or none (Irish Bishops' Conference, 2007, 3).

It is evident that the current primary school system, dominated by denominational schools with a RC ethos does not adequately cater for parents who do not wish their children to receive a 'Catholic education'. The admissions policies of such state-aided schools discriminate on the basis of religious belief. The restrictive admissions policy and exclusive ethos of the majority of existing primary schools is particularly problematic in rural areas where the distance to multid denominational or other non-Catholic schools may be prohibitive and areas where there is a high demand for school places, where non-Catholic children may be denied a place in local schools.

A limited number of non-religious organisations are, however, also registered, as patron bodies with the Department of Education and Science³ (DoES). These organisations seek to support and promote the establishment of multi-denominational schools and schools through the medium of the Irish language. The first multi-denominational school was established in 1978 in Dalkey (in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown) in the context of opposition from the RC Church and a lack of cooperation from the DoES (Curry 2003, 85). Educate Together, established in 1984 is the representative body and patron for the majority of multi-denominational schools in the state. There are currently 56 primary schools in the State under the patronage of Educate Together, 31 of which are located in the Greater Dublin Area (Educate Together 2010). The total number of multi-denominational schools has increased very significantly in recent decades⁴ with Educate Together schools accounting for a high proportion of all new school openings, indicating a high level of parental demand for multi-denominational schooling. The long-term goal of Educate Together is for there to be sufficient Educate Together model multi-denominational schools to allow all parents and children access to

³ The Department of Education and Science (DoES) was renamed as the Department of Education and Skills in April 2010.

⁴ Drudy and Lynch (1993, 76) reported a total of ten multi-denominational or inter-denominational ordinary primary schools.

such a school within a thirty minute commute (Educate Together 2007, 20). This long-term vision recognises the existing spatial disparities in the choice of schools available to primary school students and their parents.

The majority of Irish-language primary schools (*gaelscoilleanna*) are under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta na Scoilleanna Lán Ghaeilge Teo (An Foras), established in 1993 as an alternative patronage model for Irish-language schools. There are currently 57 primary schools under the patronage of An Foras, including RC, inter-denominational and multi-denominational schools.

3. The Role of the State and Current Challenges

Both national and local government have until recent years played minor roles in terms of the planning and provision of schools. Responsibility for the development of education policy and the provision of funding has rested with the central government Department of Education and Skills (DoES). In contrast with developments in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where education policy has been governed by similar legal and administrative systems, devolution of responsibilities for education provision to Local Authorities has not occurred in Ireland. The capital development costs and current expenditure of denominational schools are both funded by the State through the DoES although in the majority of cases the ownership of school buildings rests with the various Church authorities.

Local administrative structures were introduced in the form of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) through the Vocational Education Act of 1930 to provide technical and applied education both at second level and for adults outside of the mainstream third level education sector. There are a total 33 VECs in the state, generally based on Local Authority boundaries. Although the VEC committees include elected members nominated by the relevant Local Authorities, the VECs constitute separate parallel structures with limited links to local government (O' Sullivan, 2003).

The 2008 OECD review of public service integration in Ireland found that while decision-making and policy formulation is centralised, management and implementation responsibilities have been decentralised to the level of individual school's boards of managements. The review recommended delegating some decision-making capacity to individual schools and regrouping some implementation functions through local or regional administrative structures (OECD, 2008, 341). The 1991 OECD review of education policy similarly pointed to the potential benefits of 'regionally based administrative units'. It was argued that the introduction of regional structures would provide the Department the freedom to concentrate on strategic policy issues rather than its (then) dominant concern with comparatively minor administrative issues related to individual schools. Recent developments indicate that the VEC structures may take a more central role in the provision of primary school education in future years with the establishment of state-run community national schools under the auspices of County Dublin VEC.

Table 1 below indicates the current division of responsibilities in relation to the planning, provision and management of primary schools in Ireland. As identified above, responsibility is fragmented among a range of public bodies and civil society organisations (patron bodies). While school

management, admissions policy and school ethos are under the control of patron bodies, decision-making on school building capital investment programmes and school curriculum issues rests with the Department of Education and Skills. The role of Local Authorities has been restricted to the identification of potential sites for schools in City/County Development Plans and the processing of applications for planning permission to build new schools submitted by the DoES (see sections 4 and 5 below).

Organisation	Responsibilities
Department of Education and Skills	Education policy, payment of salaries, provision of capital grants, recognition of new schools, school curriculum, school building
School Patron Bodies	Ownership and management of schools, admissions policies, school ethos, employment of staff, initial establishment of new schools, demonstration of viability of new schools
Local Authorities	Limited role in planning of new schools, identification of sites, provision of information on development trends
Vocational Education Committees	Emerging role in relation under new patronage model for community national schools

Table 1: Division of Responsibilities for Planning, Provision and Management of Primary Schools

Source: analysis by the author.

The concentration of particularly intensive population growth in areas of rapid residential development within the Dublin city-region has led to a sharp increase in demand for primary school places in particular requiring a significant level of investment and a coordinated and strategic response from central and local government and other stakeholders. The 2008 OECD review notes that whereas rapid population growth has led to a dramatic increase in demand for school places in recent years, the school system in Ireland continues to be fragmented and small-scale with four or less teachers in over 50% of schools, reflecting low population densities in large parts of the country and a historical trend of declining school student numbers throughout the 1990s (OECD, 2008, 340-3, Figure 1 below). Primary school student numbers declined from over 550,000 in 1989 to just less 440,000 in 2000 before increasing to 486,444 in 2007.

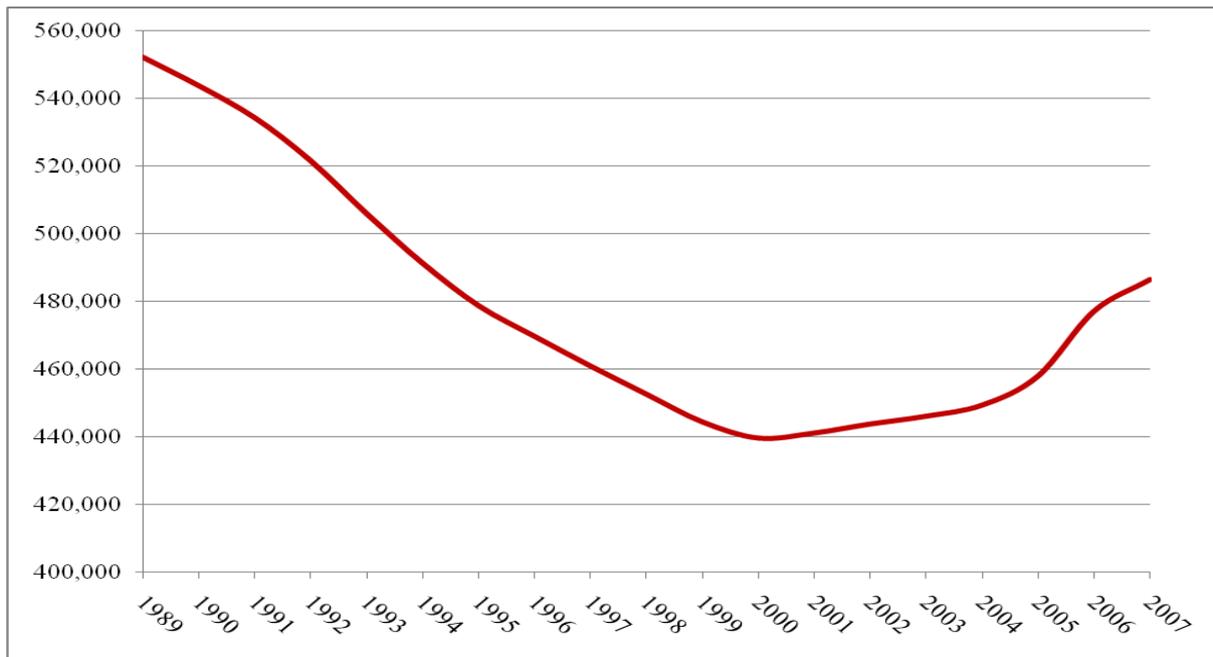


Figure 1: Decline and Expansion of Primary School Student Numbers: 1989-2007

Source: Department of Education and Skills (2010): years refer to the school year beginning in September of the stated year, analysis by the author.

Studies and commentaries in the late 1980s pointed to the planning of school provision and resources within the context of population decline as a ‘key problem’ of facing the DoES (Coolahan, 1990, Mulvey, 1990). It was argued that the existing volume of school buildings would not be required in future years:

It seems incontrovertible that the current stock of schools will not be required in the years ahead (Coolahan, 1990, 15).

A report of the National Economic and Social Council on the implications of demographic change for education policy (NESCC, 1983) included an analysis of net migration flows for specific age cohorts and recommended the publication of ten-year rolling demographic projections on an annual basis, arguing that ‘the long-term ramifications of growth in the educational system and associated resource requirements warrant a regular and comprehensive review’ (1983, 30). It is apparent, however, that the full implications of demographic change in the 1990s were not recognised by the Department of Education and Science (DoES).

In 1996 a Commission on School Accommodation⁵ (CSA) was established as a semi-independent agency of the DoES to provide policy advice on school planning and accommodation issues. The establishment of the CSA indicated an increased awareness on the part of the DoES of the need to

⁵ The secretariat of the CSA consists of an executive chairperson (a former primary school principal teacher) and one administrative officer. The steering committee, however, also includes representatives of patron bodies, trade unions, and school managers as well as a representative of the DoES.

adopt a strategic and proactive role in relation to the provision of educational infrastructure. Reflecting the national context of declining school student numbers, however, initial reports and studies published by the CSA concerned the amalgamation of small rural schools rather than planning for demographic growth. An interview⁶ with the executive chairperson of the CSA indicates that the rapid pace of population growth and associated spatial development patterns of recent years took the education system by surprise:

Well, prior to 1996... it was all decline. The increase in population took a turn a significant turn in 2002/2003 it started and that changed the focus from planning for decline to planning for expansion. I think most of us were caught a bit by surprise by the alacrity of which the change took place. It was amazing. The inflow in non-nationals and the increase in the labour force and the urbanisation of it and the satellite towns that developed as a result of that and the commuting influence of that; a complete network that is so complex you couldn't be definite about anything (E1).

More recent reports of the CSA have, contributed to the development of a proactive spatially-differentiated approach to the planning and provision of primary schools (section 4 below). An interview with a trade union official representing primary school teachers, however, points to a general absence of capacity in relation to planning for schools by the DoES or Local Authorities due to a historical reliance on religious denominations to provide schools:

There isn't a huge tradition of planning by either local or central government, because you had the situation where ... ah that's the Church's responsibility. The Church will build schools (E5)

The same interviewee reflects that current efforts in relation to the planning and provision of schools are hampered by a lack of coordination and communication between the DoES and Local Authorities:

And now we are into a situation where obviously central government and local government have to plan but unfortunately the two arms of government don't work in tandem with one another. The Local Authority giving permission for massive housing development without informing central government there's a need for a school here and a school there. (E5)

The CEO of a multi-denominational school patron body (Educate Together) argues that the provision of new schools in developing areas has been dependent on the initiative of the local community to campaign or lobby for school to be provided to meet the demand arising from new development:

It has up until very recent times been totally dependent on the local community in the sense that the State has felt it was acceptable to give planning permission for entire estates of houses without any provision for the timely provision of... educational

⁶ In this paper interviews are identified alphanumerically. The prefix indicates the role or position of the interviewee: E = Education sector stakeholder, R = regional policy stakeholder, L = local policy stakeholder, N = national policy stakeholder.

infrastructure for the families moving into those areas. The State's involvement up until very recent times... has been restricted to literally asking the Local Authorities to reserve sites for schools in the planning arrangement and stepping back and washing its hands of the entire process. (E2)

It is further argued that the DoES does not make adequate provision for diversity in the provision of schools, and thus fails to cater for parents who do not wish for their children to receive a religious education in a denominational school:

In particular the Department do not currently consider the diversity ground as a criterion for the recognition of new schools. They are only currently interested in bums on seats. So that for example in Wexford [in southeast Ireland] if the extension of a Catholic school met the capacity targets they wouldn't consider opening a new school despite the fact that in Wexford there is nothing but faith-based schools. There is no provision for those who want an alternative (E2).

It is evident that planning for the provision of primary needs to take full account of the increasingly multi-cultural nature of society in Ireland as well as recognising the potential for a reduced role for religious institutions in the provision of education. A new alternative state-run model of school patronage was introduced in 2008 with the opening of two primary schools in North Dublin under the patronage of the County Dublin VEC. These schools were both located in an area with a high level of in-migration. The question of religious instruction, however, remains an issue of significant debate in relation to the new patronage model (Flynn, 2008), Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science, 2008).

4. Policy and Legislative Change: Linking School Provision and Spatial Planning

A range of legislative changes introduced since 1998 have substantially altered the legal basis of church-state relations in the education sector in Ireland, leading to a significant shift in the control of education from Church to State. Specifically the 1998 Education Act and subsequent legislation established the legal principal of democratic choice in relation to the provision of education, indicating a requirement for the State to ensure the provision of education caters for the religious and ethical beliefs of all citizens (Glendenning 2008, 296). In 1999 the Minister for Education and Science, announced that the DoES would take responsibility for the purchase of sites for schools leading to an increasingly direct role for the state in the planning and provision of school accommodation (Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science, 2006). Prior to 1999 patron bodies were required to acquire sites for schools, although in many cases sites were provided for free by local landowners to Church authorities for the purpose of building a school.

More recently, a number of changes in policy and practice have led to the emergence of a new approach to planning for school accommodation. Funding for school infrastructure has increased very significantly with capital expenditure for school building allocated by central government through the National Development Plans. Investment in the DoES capital investment programme for school buildings increased by almost six hundred percent between 1992 and 2006 from €94.1 million

to €644.6 million (OECD, 2008, 343). A high level of public investment in education infrastructure was necessary, however, to respond to a significant infrastructural deficit arising from fiscal restraint measures introduced at a time of economic recession in the 1980s (OECD, 1991, 2008). The DoES has also invested significant resources to increase the capacity of the department to strategically plan for new school requirements in areas of significant residential development and population growth. As outlined below, the capacity for coordination between the DoES and the planning functions of Local Authorities has also increased, facilitated by formal policy statements and agreements and informal practices.

The Commission on School Accommodation (CSA) in particular, has provided a policy forum, facilitating discussion and debate among stakeholders in the education sector. A report published by the CSA in 2002 detailed a new spatial approach to planning for school accommodation (CSA, 2002). Significantly, the report adopted a differentiated spatial perspective, explicitly distinguished between geographical areas with different school accommodation needs as indicated below:

- Developing areas with a current or projected high demand for school places;
- Urban areas with aging populations;
- Rural areas of population decline.

This typology of areas differentiated by demography and school accommodation needs is non-exhaustive. The report, however, argues that different ‘models’ of planning school provision are required in the case of areas of each type. Specific areas where each model may be applicable are further identified. The ‘developing areas’ listed are concentrated in areas of urban expansion in the greater Dublin area, wider ‘Dublin commuter belt’, and areas of suburban and peri-urban development at the outskirts of Galway, Limerick and Cork (Table 2).

The criteria employed for the identification of developing areas is not explicit, although an ED-level map of 1996-2002 intercensal population change is included within the report, indicating that recent populations trends may have been employed as a guide to current and future patterns of development.

It is also likely that the identification of developing areas followed discussion among the steering committee and technical working group of the CSA. It may be noted, however, that the regional classification employed does not reflect the definition of the Greater Dublin Area adopted by the Strategic Planning Guidelines (BSM et al. 1999). Urban areas with aging populations listed include the city council areas of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick, while Leitrim, Monaghan, Longford and Roscommon are listed as rural areas in ‘immediate need for consideration for school planning’ (CSA, 2002, 24). Three case studies were conducted to explore the particular issues and appropriate policy responses relating to each of the three area types. The report specifically identified the need for an evidence-based approach to planning for new schools, based on demographic statistics and enrolment information and active consultation with patron bodies. The report further specified that the responsibility for the identification of sites for new schools in developing areas should follow communication, collaboration and co-operation between the DoES, patron bodies and Local Authorities. In January 2004 the Minister for Education and Science subsequently announced the

introduction of a new model for school planning stating that decisions on the provision of new schools would only be made following a transparent consultation process:

In future the provision of new schools will be decided only after a transparent consultation process. Parents, trustees, sponsors of prospective new schools and all interested parties from a locality will have the opportunity to have their voices heard in the process (DoES, 2004).

The publication of 'Area Development Plans' for school provision (ADPs) was announced as a central element of this new model. The ADPs, following the recommendations of the CSA report were intended to provide a blueprint for the development of schools in rapidly growing areas for a period of up to ten years, against which all capital investment decisions would be made (DoES 2004).

County/region	Area
Greater Dublin Area	Lucan/Adamstown Swords Balbriggan Donabate North Dublin (Phibblestown/Littlepace/Tyrellstown) Kiltipper Saggart Rathcoole Newcastle Ballycullen Stepaside
Meath	Ratoath Dunshaughlin Dunboyne Bettystown Laytown
Kildare	Naas Celbridge Maynooth Kilcock
Louth	Drogheda
Dublin Commuter Belt	Navan/Mullingar/Newbridge Tullamore/Portlaoise/Carlow Arklow/Wicklow/Gorey
Galway	Galway Rural Area within Galway county Galway City proximate to Oranmore
Limerick	Limerick Rural Area (selected EDs)
Cork	Glanmire Carrigtohill

	Grange Carrigaline
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Table 2: Developing Areas with a Current or Projected High Demand for School Places

Source: Adapted from Commission on School Accommodation (2002, 23).

Within the Dublin city-regions ADPs have been published for an area extending from Leixlip in northeast Kildare to Kilbeggan in Westmeath along the M4/N4 motorway/national primary route (CSA, 2005) and North Dublin (Fingal) (CSA, 2007) . In addition, a draft ADP was published for North Dublin, East Meath and South Louth in January 2007 (DoES, 2007). The preparation of ADPs has followed a two stage process. A draft plan outlining the status and potential capacity of existing schools and assessing the future demand for school places, based on demographic projections and Local Authority spatial plans is initially prepared by the DoES. Although Local Authority CDPs and LAPs are recognised as an important source of information required to assess future demand for school places, the ADPs produced to date do not make explicit reference to the spatial strategies of the relevant CDPs or RPGs. The ADPs do, however, make reference to the potential housing output of zoned lands in individual urban centres. Subsequently a process of consultation with patron bodies, school authorities and other stakeholders within the boundaries of the designated developing area is facilitated by the CSA. In the case of the North Dublin ADP consultation process, a total of 54 separate submissions were made, the majority of which were submitted by the management of individual schools located in Fingal. Two submissions however, took the form of petitions from parents, each with multiple signatures (1,443 parents in support of an autistic unit in Balbriggan and 223 parents in support of a new secondary school in Lusk), indicating a high level of interest and concern with regard to these particular issues (CSA, 2007, Appendix C).

Policy guidelines on Development Plans published by the DoEHLG in 2007 set out new guidelines on the provision of schools in an appendix to the main document (DoEHLG, 2007a). Following the emphasis on consultation and cross-sectoral coordination in the main document, the emphasis is placed on ‘engagement’ with the DoES by Local Authorities at the preparatory stages of making a new City/County Development Plan. In particular, the guidelines state that this early consultation should focus on the ‘likely scale of development that can be realistically anticipated over the life of the new development plan’ (DoEHLG, 2007a, 85). This statement places the emphasis on the capacity of the CDPs to guide the spatial development of the Local Authority area over the plan period or to provide a realistic indication of the scale and spatial distribution of anticipated development. The guidelines implicitly acknowledge that Local Authority spatial plans may not in themselves provide a ‘realistic’ assessment of the scale of expected development over the period of the plan. As a consequence, consultation and engagement between the DoES and Local Authorities may be required. Through such informal processes of coordination the experiential and tacit knowledge of Local Authority planning officials may supplement the formal policy statement of the spatial planning document.

The guidelines propose that in cases where new school provision is agreed to be a significant issue by both the Local Authority and the DoES, appropriate sites for schools should be considered, having regard to planning issues of accessibility, potential complementary usage of school facilities and DoES specifications. Following the identification of potential sites for schools, it is advised that submissions for the zoning of land should be considered in light of the pre-identified sites. The sequencing proposed here, however, assumes a significant capacity on the part of the Local Authority to determine the spatial distribution of development within a Local Authority area. In the context of a legacy of excessive zoning of land for residential development, this capacity may in fact be significantly limited (see Kitchin et al. 2010). The pre-identification of sites during a CDP preparation process may also limit the capacity of Local Authorities to negotiate with developers regarding the provision of sites for schools. It does however, represent an attempt to ensure that schools are located optimally to maximise accessibility in conjunction with safe walking and cycling routes and/or public transport.

The Development Plan policy guidelines were followed in 2008 by the publication of a 'Code of Practice' on 'The Provision of Schools and the Planning System' (DoEHLG & DoES, 2008). Significantly this policy statement was published jointly by the DoES and DoEHLG, following intensive discussion and consultation between the two departments and representatives of the Local Authorities. In recognition of the joint cross-departmental approach the 'Ministerial Foreword' to the document is signed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Urban Renewal and Developing Areas. The Code of Practice established three principles concerning the coordination of education and spatial planning functions:

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 should be driven by and emerge from an integrated approach between planning authorities and the DoES;
3. Local Authorities will support and assist the DoES in ensuring the timely provision of school sites.

Source: Adapted from DoEHLG & DoES (2008, 5).

These principles explicitly identify the role of Local Authorities in ensuring schools are provided as part of an integrated spatial planning approach to sustainable urban development and in assisting the DoES in the process of site identification and acquisition. More specifically the Code of Practice sets out a methodology for the assessment of future demand for primary school places by the DoES. The specific criteria and data sources identified for the assessment of the future demand for primary school places are as follows:

- The anticipated increase in population for each city/county over the next nine years as set out in Local Authority spatial plans and taking into account national and regional population projections and targets;
- The current school-going population as indicated by school records;

- The increase in school-going population, assuming that an average of 12% of the population is expected to present for primary education.

Source: Adapted from DoEHLG and DoES (2008, 8).

This methodology seeks to provide a rational objective basis for the assessment of future demand for school places based on available statistical data. It does not, however, make allowance for the uncertainty of inherent in population projections and in particular the disaggregation of national and regional population figures in Local Authority spatial plans. The anticipated rate of population growth within a Local Authority area is directly related to the capacity of the Local Authority to anticipate, guide and direct the scale and pace of residential development which in practice may vary quite significantly. The methodological assumption that 12% of the population are of primary school-going age further indicates the weaknesses of the essentially aspatial approach adopted by the DoES. An approximate figure of 12% may accurately reflect the proportion of the total population of the state of primary school age but ignores the dramatic contrasts in age profiles evident at a county and sub-county scale of analysis and the probability that areas that have experienced rapid development in recent years will have considerably younger age profiles. Figure 2 illustrates the extent of spatial variation in the share of population aged 0-9 years in the Greater Dublin Area in 2006. Whereas the mean value across all EDs was 13.6%, the share of population in this age group ranged 2.6% to 29.8% indicating very significant spatial variations in the demand for primary school places both in 2006 and future years. A sharp contrast is evident between central city and inner suburban areas with low populations of young children and peri-urban areas of recent development with significantly younger age profiles and a higher propensity for further population increase (see also Walsh, 2008). It is also significant to note that the Code of Practice does not make any reference to the DoES Area Development Plans which were introduced as a policy framework and evidence base to guide the planning and provision of schools in areas of rapid development.

The methodological approach outlined in the Code of Practice furthermore, focuses exclusively on demand for school places arising from population growth and demographic change. It does not address the potential additional demand for school places that might be required to cater for parental choice in both established and developing areas. The Code of Practice makes reference to the potential for Local Authorities to acquire sites for schools on behalf of the DoES.

The precise circumstances or mechanisms governing the purchase of sites for schools are not detailed however, possibly reflecting sensitivities concerning the partnership agreement with Fingal County Council:

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 (DoEHLG & DoES, 2008, 14).

DoEHLG Guidelines for Planning Authorities entitled 'Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas' published in 2009 further emphasised the assessment of existing schools capacity as a

prerequisite prior to the commencement of ‘substantial residential development’ (DoEHLG, 2009b, 26). It is specifically recommended that applications for planning permission for residential developments consisting of in excess of 200 residential units should be accompanied by a report assessing the likely demand for school places arising from the proposal and the capacity of existing schools in the vicinity. This policy recommendation places responsibility for assessing future demand for school places at the micro-level, with private developers leading to potential duplication of work conducted by the Local Authority and DoES. The 2009 guidelines also recommend the introduction of phasing arrangements for large-scale residential developments, linking the phased completion of new dwellings with the provision of school facilities (DoEHLG, 2009b, 26). Such phasing arrangements were already introduced in a number of LAPs in Fingal County Council prior to the preparation of the guidelines, indicating a process of policy development learning from existing good practice. A DoEHLG official refers to the recent legislative and policy developments, discussed above, as positive example of coordinated policy-making and strategic planning in response to issues identified ‘at a community level’:

[I]t’s an example of the system working – issues arising at a community level – finding expression through the democratic mandate and the public service... working to address those issues and I think we’ve dealt with it very fast. A six month turnaround in relation to a major package of legislative reform – policy guidelines and new arrangements for acquisition of sites is a very impressive performance by the public service (N1).

It is evident, however, that an absence of effective policy coordination and strategic planning has led to significant delays and inadequacies in the provision of educational infrastructure. The limited capacity of the policy system and public service to plan for the provision of new primary schools has been particularly evident in areas of relatively rapid residential development within the Dublin city-region and elsewhere as demonstrated in sections 5 and 6 below.

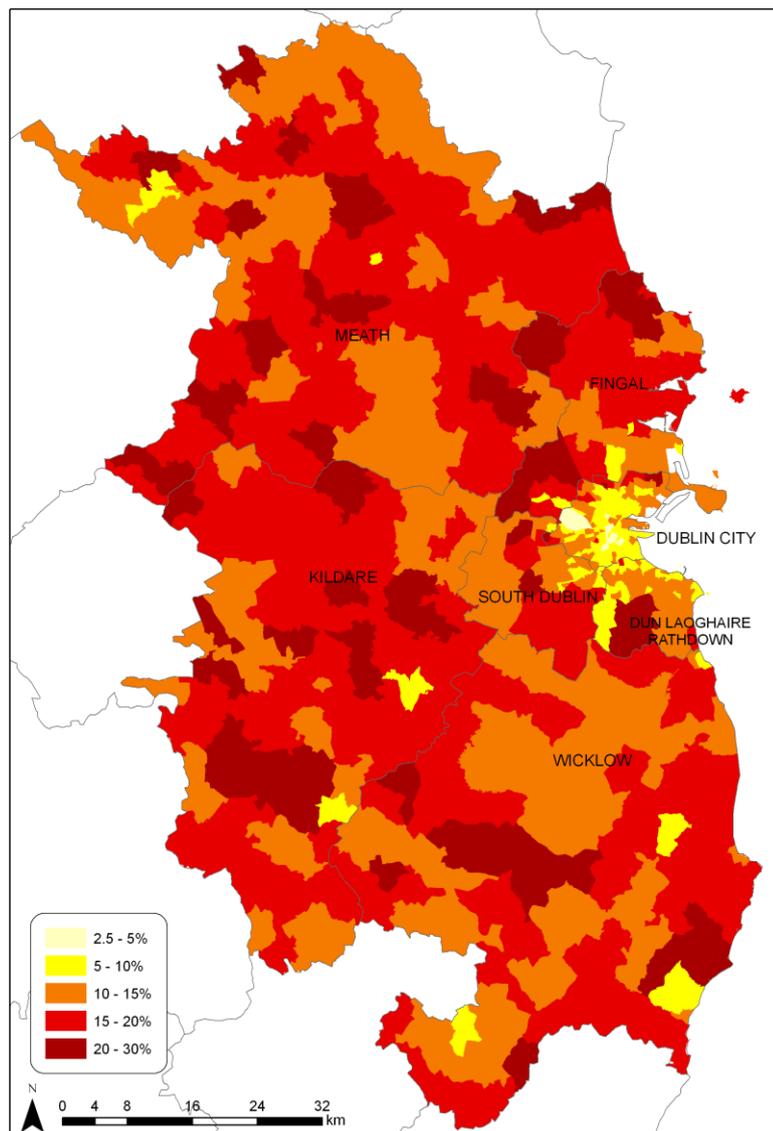


Figure 2: Percentage Share of Population Aged 0-9 Years in each ED in the Greater Dublin Area, 2006
 Source: Census of Population, 2006, analysis and mapping by the author.

Ordnance Survey Ireland boundary datasets. Ordnance Survey Ireland Permit No. MP009006 © Government of Ireland.

5. School Planning in Practice

This section examines the changing practice of planning for school accommodation in the context of policy reform and demographic and socio-economic developments. Interviews with local and Regional Authority officials and actors in the education sector provide a critical insight into the changing role of Local Authorities, issues in relation to the acquisition of sites for schools and the

development of an innovative model for school planning and development introduced through a partnership agreement between the DoES and Fingal County Council.

A Local Authority official outlines a sharp demarcation of responsibilities between the Local Authority and the DoES:

Sites are being identified. The delivery of those sites, what the council [Local Authority] can do is to make the land available with a suitable land-use zoning objective for community facilities, for a school. To acquire that land - that's a matter for the Department of Education (L5).

A senior Local Authority planner further indicates that the identification of sites by Local Authorities through the statutory planning process has not necessarily led to action by the DoES in terms of acquiring the site and providing school accommodation. It is noted that relations between the Local Authority and the DoES were characterised by a lack of contact or cooperation:

Over the years we would have attempted to identify sites in large developments and reserve them. The Department of Education at the time really had no interest in talking to us about these sites, their protection or when there would be a school. We would look at it in terms of when a school will be needed here and our really sole function was to try and reserve a suitable site. After that the provision of that, obviously is for the Department of Education. We didn't really have a great degree of contact or cooperation from them (L3)

A senior planner in Meath County Council argues that school planning has become a central element of the spatial plans produced by the Local Authority. A new partnership approach between the Local Authority and the DoES is identified as a very positive development:

[School planning] has become a much more central tenet of particularly of Local Area Plans that we are doing... You have to ensure you have sufficient land identified for school provision... [A] new initiative... has been the willingness of the Department to cooperate with us in terms of trying to locate maybe a community type of facility on school grounds and using the school sports hall as a community facility in the evenings. There is more of a partnership approach... That's a certain change I would have noticed in the last couple of years... which is very positive. (L4)

The current Regional Planning Guidelines officer for the Dublin and Mid-East Regions argues that the capacity of the DoES to strategically assess the potential demand for new schools in areas of residential development has been constrained by the absence of a spatial perspective. The aspatial approach to planning for education provision adopted by the DoES contrasts with the spatial planning perspective of the Local Authorities where the spatial relations between existing and proposed schools and areas of new residential development were explicitly identified:

They had no mapping at all. I know in Fingal we used to hand them sheets and sheets of maps with dots showing where schools were and blobs showing where the new

housing was because they didn't have anything like that. It is very hard for them to be able to even see the scale of growth that was happening (R3).

It is further suggested argued that the DoES are reluctant to recognise the potential strategic spatial planning role of the regional and Local Authorities in relation to the provision of school accommodation, due to an institutional preference for maintaining policy and investment decision-making within the DoES:

It is partly that the DoES prefer to make decisions themselves as to what is priority and where investment should go based on the information supplied and not that we would be setting the priorities for them because that would be from their point of view an over-influencing of their decisions (R3).

The OECD review of public service integration similarly found that the 'vision' in relation to the planning and provision of schools has been restricted by a narrow perspective focussed on the institutional capacity and resources of the civil service (in this case the DoES), rather than a broader public service approach concerned with the overall capacity of the central and local government systems (OECD, 2008, 253). It is noted however that the DoES have attended a meeting of the Dublin Regional Authority, which is was viewed as a positive 'step forward' in terms of the engagement of the DoES with local and Regional Authorities at a political level:

We have invited the DoES to a couple of meetings. They have come and made a presentation to the councillors, which is a real step forward for the DoES. For civil servants to meet local councillors is a rarity. They don't tend to step outside dealing with just one Minister. That was a real plus and a real outreach from them and I think the councillors were amazed they were there at all (R3).

The executive chairperson of the Commission on School Accommodation, however, argues that Local Authority spatial plans are idealistic and do not necessarily provide a realistic or reliable indicator of future demand for school places, indicating a perception on the part of policy and decision-makers in the education sector that spatial plans have only a limited capacity to guide the spatial distribution of development:

They are an indicator, more than a reliable one. County Development Plans are, I suppose, idealistic... There is a big difference between what is the ideal and the reality because there are so many things that have to happen (E1).

More specifically, the same interviewee indicates that high vacancy rates in recent residential developments make the assessment of the actual level and spatial distribution of population growth difficult, adding further complexity and uncertainty to the assessment of future demand for school places:

What has happened in the recent past is that the number of houses built, you wouldn't want to make any assumptions about it. There is a significant number of houses vacant. You could be very out. There is no doubt there are a lot of developers [who have] over-built and this was very haphazard. (E1).

He suggests that surveys of new residential areas following their completion provide a superior indication of levels of occupancy, household types and age profiles. This approach, however, postpones the planning and development of new schools until after new residential areas are occupied leading to potentially significant delays and a shortage of school places in the short term. In a presentation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science, an assistant secretary in the DoES with responsibility for the provision of school accommodation points to Local Authority spatial plans as 'one of the most important sources' of information to plan for the correct levels of school accommodation (Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science (OJCES) 2006). He further notes that 'a substantial amount of time and resources' of the school planning section within the DoES are 'dedicated to ongoing contacts with the Local Authorities, especially in Dublin and within the Dublin commuter belt'. The DoES assistant secretary points to significant difficulties in relation to site acquisition for schools. He indicates that the DoES is required to pay the full market value of development land in order to acquire sites for schools:

Effectively under the current regime, the Department of Education and Science is just another buyer in a buoyant market. This is compounded by the fact that in most cases, the Department needs land right at the heart of housing developments. Unlike for commercial developers, by the very nature of school provision, which is grounded in ease of access by the residents of housing developments, the range of choice open to us is quite limited (senior official, DoES, OJCES November 2006).

Significantly, the above extract indicates that the zoning of land for social and community or education purposes in CDPs or LAPs is not an effective mechanism for ensuring the availability of land at lower cost than land zoned for residential development within areas of rapid development. The CEO of Educate Together argues that the state is responsible for the conversion of zoning of land for development, and consequently the increased price which the DoES is required to pay for school sites:

The current building requirement is well over 1 billion euro, poured down the drain, buying sites the State converted from agricultural value to prime development value so it is paying the penalty for its own largesse. It's an absurdity (E2).

He further contends that it would be possible to acquire sites for free from private developers, if the legislative provisions were introduced. He sees an incentive for developers to become involved in the development and construction of schools in order to attract house buyers. This contention reflects the provisions of the 2009 Planning and Development Amendment Bill which proposes to introduce similar provisions and place responsibility with private developers for the provision of school sites in areas of significant residential development:

If the law would be changed, we believe in building estates it is possible for the state to drive a bargain where in actual fact the schools are built at no cost to the state at all. If it was a condition of the planning permission, our experience with developers is that they would be perfectly prepared to build and design, to compete with other developers... to attract buyers to their estate. It is just sheer lack of courage to take these decisions (E2).

A senior Local Authority official argues that capital investment costs including the price of land significantly restrict the capacity of the DoES to acquire school sites designated by Local Authorities in CDPs and LAs:

It's a commitment they can't financially honour, which is part of the problem (L2).

An official working with County Meath VEC similarly notes that developers are aware of the potential benefits of providing a site for school. He refers to a case in Navan (the largest town in Meath) where a number of developers were competing to provide a site for a second level school.

Developers are now conscious that it is attractive to actually offer lands for a school. There is more than one developer I am aware of, maybe three that are offering alternative sites for schools at what will probably be a reasonable rate in order to facilitate the further opening up of adjoining lands for building (E6).

He further suggests that location of the planned school, in this case, may provide a test of the transparency of the school planning system, indicating that the final decision on the location of the school might be influenced by informal negotiations between the Local Authority and the competing developers:

[The Area Development Plan process] has increased the transparency... The one that will be the proof of the pudding will be where this school goes in Navan eventually and why (E6).

One interviewee further contends that the identification and acquisition of sites for schools is highly 'political' subject to lobbying from politicians:

It is a very political section, I could imagine it is subject to an awful lot of lobbying – which schools go ahead and which don't, which sites get bought and which don't (R3)

6. The Fingal Schools Model

In 2006 an innovative partnership agreement between Fingal County Council and the DoES for the accelerated provision of schools and community was announced. The 'Fingal Schools Model' agreement enabled for the Council to act as the agent of the DoES to purchase sites for schools at the request of the DoES. The agreement recognised the capacity of the Local Authority to negotiate with private developers during the preparation of Local Area Plans in order to acquire sites for schools at a cheaper rate than would be possible by the DoES at a later stage. Under the terms of the agreement 50% of the savings in capital costs to the DoES is reinvested in enhanced school facilities by the Local Authority. Full-size sports halls, stage and dressing rooms, community meeting rooms and all-weather pitches were identified as potential enhanced facilities that could be delivered under this model, indicating the scale of the potential savings (DoES, 2006). Significantly the agreement also ensured that the facilities of the school would be available for wider community use outside of school hours. On signing the agreement in July 2006 the Minister for Education and Science expressed the hope that the Fingal model would serve as an example for other Local

Authorities and would be 'replicated nationally over time'. The Minister further identified the model as an example of 'cross-government co-operation... with tangible results' for other Government Departments and agencies to follow' (DoES 2006). The Fingal model is further commended as an example of progressive local government involvement in school planning by the OECD review of the Irish public service (OECD 2008, 350).

The Director of Community, Recreation and Amenities in Fingal County Council with principal responsibility for the implementation of the Fingal Schools Model notes that the model emerged from a recognition of a potential for coordination with the DoES in terms of providing schools and community facilities required to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing population. He argues that without the Fingal model, a community centre would only be provided through local fundraising over a period of ten years or more with significant implications for the quality of life of the residents:

If we had gone the traditional mode it would never have happened, or would have happened so many years afterwards that the quality of life of the people... would have been massively poorer in the interim while we take 10 or 12 years of fundraising to build a community centre. So this was an opportunity to go for a synergy and now its established process (L7)

He notes, however, that the scale of savings that were possible through the Fingal model was significantly dependent on the high market value of land in Fingal during the economic boom period. He acknowledges that the model would be more difficult to deliver elsewhere in the country, as envisaged by the Minister for Education and Science:

If land values are dropping as they are at the moment there is less savings that can be made, therefore we have less money to reinvest. It's not central to it but its part of it. The Model itself... still stands on its own merits. We are lucky; we are in the urban area, the capital city area, where land values tend to be higher. This model would be more difficult to deliver where land values are lower in other parts of the country (L7).

A senior official in Meath County Council similarly indicates that the potential for replication of the Fingal model is constrained by the lower resource base of other Local Authorities:

We would be slightly different to Fingal... The funding we would be getting from development levies wouldn't be anywhere near what Fingal would be getting... There is no example of that system that Fingal has. It is not in Meath at the moment. You are talking about major land-banks and major school and community centre facilities. It's a question of resources (L5).

A senior planner in Meath County Council, however, indicates that the Fingal model has been influential in terms of illustrating the potential for co-location of social and community infrastructure provided by different agencies through partnership agreements and identification of potential synergies:

The Fingal model is one that we have certainly explored with the Department... It's something we have tried to lead back to in terms of the role we feel we have in terms of

liaising with developers and liaising with councillors, liaising with the Department in terms of trying to get the best fix for the area overall rather than getting a site for a community centre, a site for a school, a site for a medical centre. We have indeed worked with the HSE as well in terms of trying to accommodate these uses in single buildings where possible and to accommodate crèches as well and so on and so forth, all in the proximity of the school (L4)

A second senior official in Fingal County Council contends that the agreement with the DoES has strained the resources of the council as the DoES has been slow to reimburse the Local Authority for the cost of acquiring sites for schools:

They [the DoES] nearly put us bust at one stage because we had acquired the sites and they didn't come up with the money. They told us not to acquire any more sites. That process was fine when the cash was flowing but now it is at a standstill. I am not so sure of the future. (L2)

Minutes of a meeting of Fingal County Council in May 2008 support this contention. It is recorded that a total of €23 million in payments for land acquisition was outstanding from the DoES at the time. It is noted however, that technical difficulties or misunderstandings were responsible for the non-payment by the DoES, rather than resource constraints on the part of the department. This instance indicates the potential risks to Local Authorities arising from informal or non-statutory collaborative partnership ventures with other state agencies. The legitimacy of the Fingal model is further questioned by the CEO of Educate Together. He argues that in practice the model has involved negotiation with private developers over parcels of land and planning permission which is not supported by legislative provisions:

[The] Minister for Education promoted what is called the Fingal model, the Fingal deal, which in our opinion is close to being a disaster...What we have seen in Fingal is essentially horse-trading over planning permissions which is not on a statutory basis (E2)

He further points to the outcome of these informal processes of negotiation as the location of schools on sites with the least potential for private sector residential development rather than on the basis of accessibility or other 'planning reasons':

[T]he sites for schools have been positioned not for best planning reasons but actually on sites which have least potential for housing development so either they have got very difficult subsoil structures... Two of those schools are close to water treatment plants which obviously would not be locations which is easy for developers to claim added value in terms of house prices. That is what has emerged (E2).

At the time of writing (May 2010) only one school has been opened directly as a part of the Fingal School Models process There are, however, 19 sites identified with the capacity to accommodate 25-30 schools within the county. It is estimated that up to 10 schools may be opened under the Fingal Schools Model within two years (Fingal County Council official, 2010, personal communication).

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has identified and discussed the process of planning and provision of schools, in the context of a high demand for school places in the Dublin city-region over the period since the mid-1990s. In particular the discussion has concerned the relationship between the infrastructure provision policies and practices of the central government Department of Education and Science (DoES) and the spatial planning functions of Local and Regional Authorities. The education authorities were not adequately prepared for the sharp increase in demand for primary school places in selected areas of rapid residential development in the Dublin city-region and thus not in a position to respond strategically to the demand for new schools. Traditionally, the State had not taken a direct role in the provision of schools, as a consequence of the unusual dominance of church authorities in the management and ownership of schools in Ireland. It is also noted that the policy of the DoES continued to be informed by a demographic context of declining student numbers predominant in the 1980s and early 1990s, leading to a policy focus on rationalisation and amalgamation of smaller schools in rural areas. It is apparent, however, that future projections of school student numbers by the DoES were not disaggregated to a regional or local level, with significant implications for the capacity of the DoES to respond to infrastructural needs arising from spatial variations in age profiles and rates of demographic change at sub-regional and local levels.

As a consequence, it is evident that, in many cases, the planning and provision of schools in areas of high demand has followed concerns voiced by local residents, rather than forming part of a public sector-led spatial planning and development process. Recent developments by the DoES and associated Commission on School Accommodation point to the emergence of a spatially differentiated forward planning approach with infrastructure provision plans produced for a number of selected areas of rapid residential development and demographic expansion. Significantly, however, it is apparent that the spatial plans of Local Authorities are not perceived to provide a realistic or reliable indication of the scale and spatial distribution of future residential development within Local Authority areas. The limited capacity of statutory spatial plans to reduce uncertainty in relation to the future location of development has led to a focus on the acquisition of sites for schools following the completion of new residential areas, when actual occupancy rates and household composition may be assessed.

A 'Code of Practice' on the provision of schools and the planning system, published jointly by the DoES and DoEHLG, represents a significant development, formally identifying and specifying the role of Local Authorities in the process of the forward planning for schools and the need for the coordination between the spatial planning functions of Local Authorities and the infrastructure provision responsibilities of the DoES. The methodology identified in the Code of Practice for assessing the demand for school places arising from demographic expansion indicates, however, that the significance of a spatial perspective has not been fully recognised by DoES.

Site acquisition is identified as an area of particular problems in terms of the cost to the State of purchasing land for schools at market prices. It is evident, however, that the cost to the State is related to the stage in the planning and development process at which acquisitions are made and the capacity of the DoES or Local Authorities to negotiate with landowners and property developers. As the planning and provision of schools in practice has followed the market-led development

patterns rather than forming part of a strategic spatial planning process, the capacity of the State to identify sites for schools in advance is significantly limited. The Fingal School Model represents a further example of the development of a coordinated approach between the DoES and a Local Authority, with potential to provide significant added benefits in terms of facilities for the wider community. Significant problems are identified, however, in relation to the provision of required finances by the DoES and the specific location of schools within areas of residential development.

This paper has clearly illustrated the challenges inherent in and potential opportunities for coordination between spatial planning policies and the infrastructure provision plans of other public sector agencies. It is evident that the absence of an adequate spatial perspective has significantly hindered the capacity of state agencies to plan for the provision of schools. Education authorities failed to recognise the implications of anticipated patterns of spatial development and demographic growth. Perhaps, more significantly however, a continued reliance on an approach to the identification of future demand for school places based on national level assumptions regarding the age composition of the population restricts the capacity of the policy system to strategically plan for future needs in areas of rapid development.

The analysis, however, also points to the weak capacity of local and regional scale spatial plans to reduce uncertainty in relation to the future scale and location of development. This critical weakness limits the potential for spatial plans to provide an effective framework for policy coordination in relation to future infrastructure requirements. The authority and governance capacity of spatial plans and in particular the spatial planning functions of Local Authorities rest, to a large extent, on prevailing perceptions of the capacity of spatial plans to provide a reliable indication of future development patterns.

It is evident that approaches to the planning and provision of new schools in areas of rapid development have changed significantly in recent years, partly as a response to the scale of the challenges posed by the recent period of rapid development, population growth and social change. Education authorities have introduced an increasingly spatially differentiated approach with a particular focus on areas of rapid development and high demand for new school places. It is apparent, however, that the processes of planning for schools including the assessment of current and future demand and the identification of potential sites for schools undertaken by both the Department of Education and Skills (DoES) continue to operate in parallel with varying degrees of coordination between the two parties at different stages of the process. Although recently published policy statements identify the specific responsibilities of both the DoES and Local Authorities, it is apparent that the policy parameters informing the planning functions and associated decision-making of both parties may differ significantly. Individual Local Authorities may be primarily concerned with the strategic planning and provision of sites for new schools, optimally located to service the current and future needs of particular residential communities. Planning for school provision undertaken by the DoES, while also concerned with demand assessment and site

identification issues is framed within the context of current capital investment programmes and evolving policy and practice in relation to patronage models for schools.

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