

ACCS Policy Objectives – revised and updated November 2020

ACCS Policy Statement

All ACCS policy is formulated pursuant to the main objectives for which the Association is established and as set out in its Articles of Association, namely:

1. To contribute with every means at its disposal to the advancement of education.
2. To advance and develop the concept of broad comprehensive curricula as enshrined in the deeds of the schools.
3. To advance and develop the wider “community” concept of the schools.

Association policy is formulated by its members at annual convention and implemented by its executive and secretariat in accordance with procedures set out in its Articles of Management, the schools’ Deed of Trust and relevant legislation.

This current document sets out the established policy of the Association in a number of areas together with policy objectives currently being pursued.

Patronage/Trusteeship of Schools

ACCS is fully committed to the model of joint patronage of schools involving local public representation (ETB) together with established religious organisations and recognized Educational Organisations. To this end the Association has supported the establishment in ACCS of the Association of Joint Patronage (AJP) in Community and Comprehensive Schools to address concerns associated with the Patronage of Schools.

The Association continues to promote the development of further Greenfield/Amalgamated Community Schools.

Current policy objectives/initiatives:

1. To support the involvement of other bodies, such as Educate Together and an Foras Patrúnachta in the Community School model of joint Trusteeship. In particular the ACCS Executive seeks to identify the reason(s) why Community or Comprehensive Schools have not been established under the two most recent patronage processes.
2. To prioritise the establishment of new Community and Comprehensive Schools through engagement with Patrons, the Department of Education and Skills and other relevant stakeholders and identify means of promoting the Community and Comprehensive School as a vibrant model for Irish Education.

There are currently two Community Schools under the joint trusteeship of an ETB and Educate Together. ACCS will continue to support the future development of such schools.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

ACCS is fully conscious of the effect of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the administration of schools and of the concern for its effect on the health and safety of pupils and staff. The Association is fully committed to the continued opening of schools in the current and future school years which it considers essential for students’ future development. ACCS acknowledges the engagement of the Department of Education in considering the ongoing opening of schools and the substantial suite of supports put in place to assist schools. ACCS also acknowledges the work of school management and staff, students and parents in their efforts to minimise the risk of transmissions of COVID-19.

The Association is fully committed to the provision of support to school management in the interpretation and administration of safety measures as outlined by Government in the course of the present situation.

In particular:

- ACCS will take all necessary steps to ensure that adequate resources are provided by the DES to ensure the health and safety of students and staff in the course of their work.
- ACCS will support the provision of adequate COVID-19 testing facilities for staff and students.

- ACCS will work with educational partners to ensure the provision of adequate teacher substitution provision where required. The provision of substitution for Secretarial and Maintenance staff is equally essential.
- Regarding the Leaving Certificate examination ACCS fully recognised and supported the suspension of the examination in 2020 and the consequent provision of “calculated grades”. All steps will be taken to safely provide for the standard Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021.
- During the course of school closures in the 2019/2020 school year ACCS provided schools with access to “Remote Learning Resources” for teachers and students. Such resources remain available as and when required.
- During the course of the Pandemic ACCS CPD programme will take the form of a series of virtual Webinar events.

Education Provision, Special Educational Needs, Examinations

ACCS is committed to the provision in each Community and Comprehensive School of a comprehensive curriculum providing for the needs of all pupils within its designated area. In particular, Association policy seeks the provision of adequate facilities for pupils with Special Educational Needs. The Association promotes the policy that all schools in receipt of state support, both fee paying and non-fee paying should meet their obligations to be inclusive and to accept a fair and proportionate share of special needs students and students from less privileged socio-economic and educational background.

To this end the Association cooperates with the work and the policies enunciated by appropriate state bodies TUSLA, NCSE, NCCA, SEC etc. The Association is fully supportive of the DEIS school concept provided that appropriate resources are available for its implementation.

In particular the Association seeks:

- that the number of Psychological Assessments allocated to schools should depend on the number of Special Needs Pupils enrolled and not on the total number of pupils in the school.
- the automatic transfer of Special Needs staffing concessions for individual students from Primary to Post-Primary schools.
- the creation of a ‘Coordinator of Special Needs’ Post for schools that have students in receipt of special needs support.
- that the DES provide adequate resources for the teaching of English to international students in our schools.
- the restoration of resource teaching hours for Traveller students in second level schools.

ACCS is fully supportive of the recent reform of the Junior Cycle curriculum and continues to support the continuation of this reform programme to the Senior Cycle. The Association will continue to promote efforts to address issues arising from reports on the standards of student Literacy and Numeracy in our schools.

ACCS is strongly opposed to the current cutbacks in educational provision and is seeking in every way possible to alleviate their effects and to promote education as the infrastructure on which Ireland’s economic future depends.

Current policy objectives/initiatives:

1. To call on the DES to consult directly with the school management bodies to ensure that the implications of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 are fair to students and operable for schools.
2. While respecting the right of parents to choose a school for their children, ACCS strongly encourages member schools that are geographically adjacent to each other to respect traditional catchment areas. Where such traditional catchment areas exist and where a dispute arises, ACCS will establish a mechanism to facilitate the resolution of such a dispute.
3. To seek from the DES a realistic review of ongoing financial support for the provision of IT in schools so that it is sustainable, not sporadic. The advent of Junior Cycle reform requires such a provision urgently. The current Pandemic has necessitated school closures and further highlighted the requirement to provide remote learning opportunities for students.

Teacher and SNA Allocations, Conditions of Service

ACCS is committed to working actively with other management bodies to seek a restoration of the level of teacher and SNA allocations which applied in 2009 prior to the introduction of recent economic measures i.e.:

- A general teacher allocation of 18:1.
- Provision for ex quota posts of Principal, Deputy Principal, Learning Support Teacher and Guidance Counsellor.

- Particular provisions for DEIS designated schools.
- Provision of Resource Teachers and Special Needs Assistants.

It remains within ACCS policy to seek:

- a further reduction in the Pupil Teacher Ratio to 16:1.
- the provision of ex quota positions of Deputy Principal and Guidance Counsellor in all schools irrespective of size.
- the provision of an ex-quota Home School Community Liaison Officer in all 2nd Level Schools.

The Association particularly seeks measures to address the shortage of qualified teachers in particular subject areas and, in particular "go mbeadh dóthain múinteoirí ar fáil chun múineadh tré mheán na Gaeilge". Further provision is sought for the provision of appropriate facilities to support the establishment of new schools and/or the amalgamation of existing schools.

Conditions of service of teaching staff are governed by agreements entered into between ACCS and Teacher Unions which are contained on the ACCS website. These agreements are subject to regular review between the parties involved.

The conditions of service and contractual obligations of SNA's arising from the Public Service (Croke Park) Agreement have been agreed and set out in DES Circular Letter 71/2011. The implementation of this agreement is continually monitored by ACCS.

Current Policy objectives/initiatives:

1. In light of the significant challenges being faced by schools recruiting teachers, the ACCS requests that the Department of Education and Skills takes immediate action in relation to teacher supply.
2. To ask the Department of Education and Skills to introduce a common pay scale for all teachers in order to encourage quality graduates into the teaching profession.
3. Iarann an rún seo ar Chumann na Scoileanna Pobail agus Cuimsitheach (ACCS) cás ar leith a dhéanamh leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scoileanna chun go mbeidh archumas scoileanna beaga múinteoirí buan a ligean ar saoire sos gairme.
4. To seek the allocation of Guidance Counselling posts to all schools on an ex quota basis particularly in light of the increasing issues, including mental health issues, which young people are presenting with in schools.
5. To seek from the National Council for Special Education and the Department of Education and Skills the maintenance of the existing provision of educational supports and the visiting teacher service for the blind/visually impaired and deaf/hard of hearing students.
6. That the Teaching Council provide appropriate registration for students in initial teacher education to enable them to undertake paid substitution in their placement school.
7. To seek an urgent review of the agreed Code of Practice for Processing Complaints made by Parents/Guardians or Students (18yrs or older) against a Teacher with the various bodies involved.

School Management and Posts of Responsibility

Responsibility for the day to day Management of the school rests with the Principal, Deputy Principal and Middle Management structure as provided by Posts of Responsibility. The previous moratorium on appointments to Posts of Responsibility was superseded by DES CL 03/2018 which set out the role of, and appointments to, Leadership and Management Posts in Post-Primary Schools.

Current policy objectives/initiatives:

1. To ask the Department of Education and Skills to place a moratorium on all business associated with Section 29 Appeals for the month of July in order to facilitate an appropriate uninterrupted holiday period for Principals.
2. While acknowledging and welcoming the allocation of additional Deputy Principals to post primary schools based on student enrolment numbers, ACCS now pursues and negotiates the allocation of an additional Deputy Principal to all DEIS schools regardless of student enrolment numbers.
3. To seek the immediate introduction of meaningful supports for school management and a re-evaluation by the Department of Education and Skills of the implementation of all current school initiatives in the context of essential supports for Principals to enable them to administer and manage our schools, to lead teaching and learning and to sustain their wellbeing.
4. ACCS undertakes:

- a. to audit the 'Initiatives', tasks and responsibilities devolved to schools and the level of implementation possible of these initiatives within existing resources.
 - b. to research the impact on the wellbeing of Principals of continuous initiatives by the Department of Education & Skills without adequate management resources and to advise the relevant bodies.
5. To seek from the DES that the directive whereby neither Principals nor Deputy Principals can be replaced if absent for up to three months be rescinded.
 6. That the ACCS would ask the DES to abolish the requirements to spend 84 days in an acting up role before the acting up allowance is paid.
 7. That ACCS calls on the Department of Education and Skills to revise the current leadership and management arrangements to allow schools, when interviewing, to create an order of merit for AP1 or AP2 posts which would allow for the appointment of staff to such vacancies as arise on a temporary basis during a given school year.

Administration, Finance, Buildings and Equipment

A Governance Manual for Community and Comprehensive Schools was developed by the Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with ACCS and the State Claims Agency and became effective on 1st September 2016.

The Manual is published in full on the ACCS website.

ACCS fully recognizes the special role of ancillary staff - Secretarial, Caretaking, Cleaning and other supports – in the efficient operation of our schools. To this end the Association is engaged with DES and with appropriate Trade Unions to seek the continued alleviation of the moratorium on clerical officer and caretaking posts in Community and Comprehensive Schools.

Agreed grievance and complaint procedures are in place and are published on the ACCS website. These procedures are subject to regular review by the Association.

Current policy objectives/initiatives:

1. That ACCS Executive would negotiate with the DES to have a promotion pathway for our school secretaries and that there would be a major review of their salaries. It is suggested that research be carried out their workload and that Grade 3 designation is no longer suitable.
2. ACCS seeks the continued alleviation to lift the moratorium on appointments of Administration Staff, Caretakers and Cleaners. The absence of adequate clerical and maintenance staff is putting an undue burden on schools which makes it more and more difficult for the school to fulfil its administrative functions and maintenance obligations and meet the needs of staff, students and parents.
3. ACCS works on behalf of schools seeking funding from the Sports Capital Programme and engages with relevant state agencies to ensure equality of access to Lottery funding for Community and Comprehensive Schools.
4. Since many Community Schools are open for long hours with afterschool activities, it is unsustainable to have just one caretaker attempting to meet the needs of the school. This review should involve consultation with the Health & Safety Authority and the State Claims Agency.
5. To seek from the Department of Education and Skills an urgent review of the provision of clerical, cleaning and caretaking allocations to our schools.
6. To request from the Department of Education and Skills the provision of CPD for senior management and administrative staff to support the implementation of the Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD).

Adult Education

ACCS continues to promote Community and Comprehensive Schools as centres of Adult and Community Education. To this end the Association supports the work of NACED – The National Association of Community Education Directors. Schools offering Self-Financing Part-Time Adult Education programmes may appoint teachers to posts of responsibility in accordance with Circulars 46/00 and 16/05.

Current policy objectives/initiatives:

- To seek the provision of funding for Adult and Community Education programmes in Community and Comprehensive Schools which relate to Adult Literacy and the alleviation of social disadvantage.