

# ACCS

## Strategic Plan

### 2021-2025



Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools  
*Cumann na Scoileanna Pobail agus Cuimsitheacha*



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# Strategic Plan 2021-2025

## *foreword*

The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) is the national representative Association for 96 Community and Comprehensive Post-Primary Schools across Ireland. Founded on the 26th March, 1982 in Milltown Park, Dublin, ACCS is one of the partners in education that participate actively in national decision making at Post-Primary level. The ACCS supports Boards of Management across 96 member schools including advice and support to schools, negotiation/policy setting and implementation, research, development and training.

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025 provides the ACCS with a clear road map and objectives. The development of the plan has benefitted greatly from the engagement of the ACCS Secretariat and the members of the ACCS Executive 2021/22 and we acknowledge and thank them for their time and commitment. It builds on the very positive work that has been completed during the previous strategic plans and sets out four key strategies for the years 2021-2025:

**Strategy 1:** Shape the future of Irish Education by Influencing and Managing Change

**Strategy 2:** Continue to embed and develop effective governance structures in Community and Comprehensive Schools

**Strategy 3:** Manage the evolution of ACCS

**Strategy 4:** Promote the C&C School Sector as a vibrant and valuable model within the Irish and International context

We look forward as an organisation to responding to the ideas and suggestions outlined in the Strategic Plan. We hope and expect that the work accomplished in accordance with the Strategic Plan will make our organisation more efficient and effective in all its aims.

Within the plan, there will be opportunities to assess and review progress and to reprioritise as and if required in response to changing circumstances. The implementation of the plan will be overseen by the Executive of ACCS and will be reported on to all our Boards of Management through the usual channels and specifically through the ACCS Annual Convention.

The plan will be circulated to all the Boards of Management and will be available on the ACCS website [www.accs.ie](http://www.accs.ie).

**John Irwin**  
ACCS General Secretary

# Strategic Plan 2021-2025

## welcome

*“Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.”*

Welcome to the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools’ Strategic Plan 2021- 2025. The plan sets out the organisation’s vision and objectives for the next four years and builds on previous plans and the endeavours of many who have gone before us. During the life of this plan, the ACCS will celebrate its 40th anniversary. As we look forward, we do so while taking stock and reflecting on what has been achieved since the inception of the organisation.

The plan was written during a global pandemic which has changed our lives immeasurably. Much has been written about the challenges and opportunities which the global pandemic has created in our lives and much of its impact is yet to be seen. There is no doubt that Covid 19 has highlighted the importance of agility and flexibility in our work practices, and a growing need for competency in using technology to support teaching and learning. However, mostly it has reminded us that the threads of good health and happiness are interwoven in the daily interactions and positive relationships with others in our school communities. Most people I meet involved with managing schools love what they do and by their nature get on with the job and meet the challenge. It is fair to say though that just because someone carries the load it doesn’t mean it is not heavy.

In ACCS, we remain true to our core purpose, which is supporting those people managing schools, the members of the Boards of Management who lead our school communities in contributing effectively towards a just, inclusive, and caring society. To continue to do this effectively, we rely on the generosity of those same school communities in sharing and supporting each other in the development of robust practices.

I look forward to continuing our work together guided by this ambitious strategic plan.

**James Duignan**  
ACCS President

# Strategic Plan 2021-2025

## Vision

- To support Boards of Management in providing a comprehensive, co-educational, multi-denominational education for all students in the local community.
- To lead Community and Comprehensive schools in contributing effectively towards a just, inclusive, and caring society.

## Mission

- To strengthen effective governance practices in member schools and to assist Board and School Management in carrying out their responsibilities.
- To promote and represent Community and Comprehensive Schools and to disseminate innovative educational practices through positive communication with our educational partners.

## Values

Delivering a model of school for the future  
*Autonomy with Accountability*

- partnership in a joint patronage model
- equity, diversity and inclusion
- a comprehensive education open to all the learners in the community
- striving for excellence and innovation across our school communities
- holistic student-centred educational experiences
- sustainability and building global awareness
- a sector-wide, partnership approach
- effective and efficient use of resources which deliver value to the public

# What We Do

- Communicate effectively with member Boards and education partners.
- Facilitate and assist member Boards in the execution of their responsibilities.
- Provide a wide-ranging programme of CPD designed to build capacity and understanding of good governance and effective teaching and learning at both Board and School leadership levels.
- Commit to use and account for resources efficiently and effectively.
- Influence and manage change by committing to sector-wide partnership initiatives.
- Promote the establishment and development of Community and Comprehensive Schools.
- Negotiate and enter into national agreements on behalf of our Boards and support them to implement these obligations.
- Act as a representative on behalf of all member Boards at various educational forums.
- Act as a representative, on request, on behalf of an individual member Board on specific issues.
- Innovate and disseminate good practice in member schools.
- Promote the innovative and creative use of ICT in member schools to facilitate the improvement of communication, and the further enhancement of Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Reporting.
- Maintain an effective organisation that complies with corporate and legal requirements.
- Promote the implementation of the FET Strategy 2020-2025 across Community and Comprehensive Schools involved in the delivery of Further Education.



# The Service Level Agreement with the Department

## Service 1:

The provision of support and advice to school management, under the patronage concerned, on the day-to-day operation of the schools they represent.

## Output 1:

Schools are provided with timely and appropriate advice and support in relation to day-to-day operational issues.

## Service 3:

Liaise with schools and represent, as appropriate, the management interests of schools at national level with the education partners.

## Output 3:

Participation and input by the ACCS at national level on relevant national committees, working groups and at other forums involving the education partners at post-primary level.

## Service 2:

Represent, as required, the management interests of schools in any relevant discussions or correspondence with the Department.

## Output 2:

ACCS engages in relevant discussions or correspondence with the Department in respect of management interests of schools.

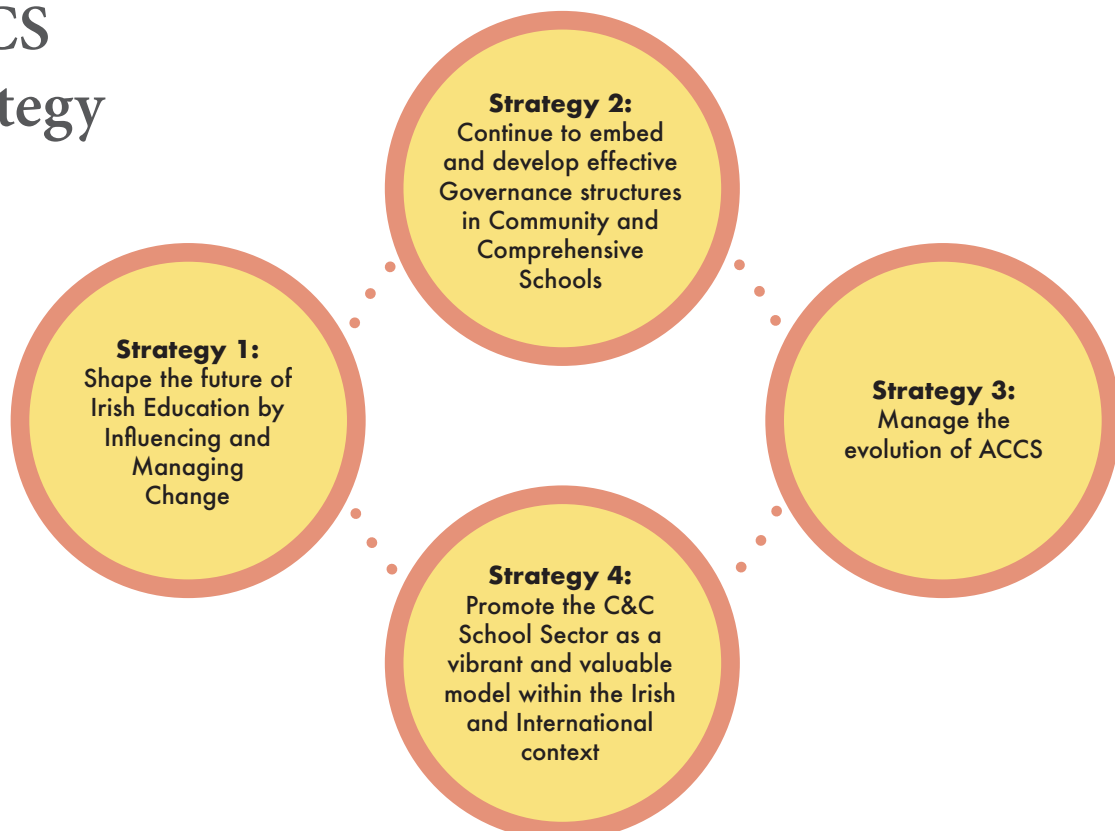
## Service 4:

Promote a consistency of approach in relation to how school management and governance matters are dealt with across its member schools so as to support compliance with statutory obligations, Department circulars and rules.

## Output 4:

ACCS engages actively in promoting a consistency of approach in relation to how governance matters are dealt with across its member schools.

## ACCS Strategy



# strategy 1:

## Shape the future of Irish Education by Influencing and Managing Change.

The current pace of change in governance for Boards of Management is significant. Additionally, in 2021 curriculum reform remains firmly on the agenda across the globe as countries engage in discussions on climate change, effects of globalisation and migration and increasing dependence on technology. These debates raise questions about the kinds of key competencies young people need for their future and where these fit into the curriculum they study in the junior cycle and in the senior cycle. ACCS is actively engaged in supporting Boards of Management and school leaders in providing guidance on leading curriculum change and in facilitating opportunities for schools to share and explore best practices.

ACCS is committed to supporting schools in embedding best practices in:

- Looking at Our School Framework 2016 (Domains 1 & 2)
- Governance matters; finance, child protection, data protection and HR
- Effective distributed leadership models (Middle Leaders Programme)
- GDPR and data protection
- School Self Evaluation
- Inclusion and Special Education Needs
- DEIS
- Promoting Student Voice (Lundy Model)
- Sustainability
- Blended learning in context of digital strategy
- SOLAS FET Strategy 2020 – 2025, building skills, fostering inclusion, facilitating pathways

### Objective 1: Support Boards of Management to manage change.

#### Action 1: Interpret legislation and regulations for member schools.

- Inform and advise Chairpersons and members of Boards of Management about the changes that are happening in the education system in a timely manner.
- Provide effective and relevant focussed training
- Foster networking and sharing of ideas and practices amongst member schools.
- Negotiate with DE, DFHERIS and other stakeholders on behalf of schools.
- Engage in Service Level Agreements as required by DE. (Building, DFHERIS, QQI & SOLAS)

#### Action 2: Identify and prioritise developments, initiatives, and changes.

Use the ACCS Executive sub-committee structure and Head Office Secretariat to support schools in managing change in the following areas:

- Allocation of resources.
- Curriculum, Teaching & Learning, Evaluation, new DE policies.
- Technology & Digital Strategy Resources.
- Further Education and Adult Education.
- Distributed Leadership Models.
- Recruitment and other HR practices and policies.
- Data Protection policies and procedures.

### Objective 2: Continue to support progress and influence developments within the education sector.

#### Action: Review how ACCS contributes to educational debates and to the evolution of new programmes and strategies in education through:

- Research.
- Submissions: Include expertise of ACCS Executive and sub-committees to inform submissions and reports to DE, DFHERIS, QQI, SOLAS and Oireachtas.
- The role and work of ACCS sub-committees.
- The engagement of external expertise in collaboration and partnership with other stakeholders.
- Engagement in consultations on changes in curriculum and the implementation of Junior Cycle Framework, the review of senior cycle and changes to SEN allocation.
- Communication of the work and message of ACCS (Information Bulletins, Newsletter & Social Media/Website).
- Engagement with parents PACCS + NPCPP.

# strategy 2:

## **Continue to embed and develop effective Governance structures in Community and Comprehensive Schools**

In its guidance on governance matters to member Boards of Management, ACCS promotes the concept of “autonomy with accountability”. This acknowledges the functions of the Board working in partnership with the joint patrons of the school and with the Department of Education and where relevant, the Department of Further and Higher Education Research Innovation and Science. The Department of Education sets down the regulations for all schools. Where more than one patron has established a school, they have equal responsibilities and authority, and must exercise their functions jointly.

One of the great strengths of Community and Comprehensive schools is the diversity of patronage bodies engaged in our schools reflecting the communities which they serve. ACCS strives to ensure that Board members are equipped to meet their governance responsibilities through its engagement with AJP and through effective CPD and advice.

In its work with AJP, ACCS seeks to develop strong partnerships, clear communication channels and robust structures which will scaffold positive relationships between Boards of Management and School Trustees.

### **Objective 1: Support Boards of Management meeting their obligations as stated in the ‘Governance Manual for Community and Comprehensive Schools’.**

**Action: Ensure guidance and advice aligns with the Governance Manual for Community and Comprehensive Schools (Sept 2016) where still relevant.**

- Highlight Governance responsibilities and resources at Area Meetings and main ACCS annual events including Annual Convention and ISM.
- Support good governance practices with the sharing of templates, checklists and other resources with schools.
- Make governance resources accessible on ACCS website.
- Support and promote the work of AJP in developing structures to facilitate proper and robust operational practices in the exercise of patronage in C&C schools.
- Work closely with APTCS, ETBI and Educate Together in supporting joint patrons in exercising their functions.
- Work closely with key regulatory and support agencies working with schools including FSSU, SPU and SCA.

### **Objective 2: Provide effective and relevant Continuous Professional Development to Board of Management members and school leaders.**

**Action: Continue to review the ACCS CPD Programme to ensure it meets the needs of member schools and Boards of Management in fulfilling their roles.**

- Evaluate and review the Individual BOM Training materials including face-to-face, online and blended approaches.
- Review and develop teams including retired and serving school leaders for design and delivery of CPD programmes including Competency Based Recruitment and Selection for Principal and Deputy Principal Appointments and the Middle Leaders Training Programme.
- Build on and further develop the online communities of practice established for ICT coordinators, SENCOs, Student Voice Leaders and VSCCS Further Education School Leaders.
- Establish and promote strategies to strengthen regional links and groupings between schools.
- Develop the website as a space for sharing resources and support materials for schools.
- Make recordings of webinars available to members.



# strategy 3:

## Manage the Evolution of ACCS

The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) is the national representative Association for the ninety-six Community and Comprehensive post-primary schools nationwide. ACCS is a Company Limited by Guarantee with registered charitable status. As a representative body, ACCS has a diverse range of powers and functions outlined in its Memorandum and Articles of Association which seek to protect, promote and enhance the interests of its membership within the education sector and the country at large. The views of the members are expressed through its wide-ranging Convention, Executive and Sub-committee structures and have a significant impact on policy and decision making in the field of Irish education.

In recent years, ACCS has expanded its services to include GDPR and data protection for Boards of Management. ACCS has established a Further Education Support Unit (FESU) in partnership with the JMB in supporting C&C schools and Voluntary Secondary schools which offer Further Education courses and/or Self-Financing Part-time Adult Education Programmes (SFAE). ACCS facilitates a wide-ranging CPD Programme and has established a number of online communities of practices among its schools in areas including promoting Student Voice, embedding effective use of technology and a SENCo forum. ACCS works in partnership with many different stakeholders in developing and facilitating its CPD Programme including, the DE Inspectorate, the NCCA, ETBI, JMB, FSSU, SCA, CSL, QQI, SOLAS and others.

### **Objective: Continue to define the role of ACCS.**

#### **Action 1: Develop the necessary capacities, skills and resources within the organisation to support its work efficiently.**

- Consider areas where additional skills/resources may be required.
- Investigate potential for collaboration with other management bodies.

#### **Action 2: Develop the organisation's structures and processes in order to achieve the vision of the organisation.**

##### Head Office Staff and Secretariat:

- Review Programme of Induction for new staff.
- CRA Compliance – Development of policies and codes.
- Financial and Audit Checks and Accountability.
- Staff training programme re internal administrative systems, MS 365 and SharePoint.

##### Executive Members:

- Review Programme of Induction for Executive members at beginning of each new year/term.
- Review work of ACCS sub-committees and role of Chairpersons.
- Define areas where regional structures can be enhanced and supported.
- Review Executive Meetings format e.g. private time, timing and presentations.

# strategy 4:

## Promote the C&C School Sector as a vibrant and valuable model within the Irish and International context

The joint patronage model as exercised in the community school model has always given an equitable voice/status to all patrons representing the broadest possible range of diversity and inclusion when establishing a new school or amalgamating several existing schools in an area.

ACCS recognises the challenges of securing new schools in the online Patronage Process System (OPPS). Currently as the process is established, the community school model is excluded in the formal OPPS. Consequently, there is no mechanism to consider patrons joining together to establish new community schools. ACCS understands that because the community school model is not presented as an option at the beginning of the process, it cannot be referenced or considered in the latter half of the process when decisions about provision are being made.

ACCS will continue to engage with the Department and Patron Bodies in promoting the Community and Comprehensive School model as one that remains relevant and fit for purpose and one that presents a real opportunity to bring together traditions which already exist in a community and to allow these traditions to develop and grow side by side. ACCS argues that this model has the capacity to meet the local educational needs for all children in the local community and is a model which remains relevant in the current ever-changing and increasingly diverse reality of Irish education. ACCS will seek to have the model included as an option for parents to consider when decisions about new schools are being made. In the meantime, Community and Comprehensive Schools forge ahead on both national and international platforms/stages.

### **Objective 1: Influence the Patronage Debate and achieve growth in the Community and Comprehensive sector.**

#### **Action: Promote Community and Comprehensive Schools as relevant and fit for purpose.**

- Continue to highlight issues of concern re OPPS with the Department of Education.
- Where there are identified competing interests for patronage of a new school, seek the facility to promote the establishment of a Community or a Comprehensive School.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with all patrons engaged in Community and Comprehensive Schools through the AJP forum.
- Establish working partnerships with APTCS and CEP.
- Establish effective structures which support robust relationships between Boards of Management and Joint Patrons.

### **Objective 2: Continue to promote the identity of Community and Comprehensive Schools.**

#### **Action: Develop an effective communications strategy based on the communication plan.**

- Promote the model, brand and ethos of C&C schools with stakeholders in school communities.
- Produce promotional materials for use by schools, outlining the history and uniqueness of the sector.
- Consider regional approaches which enhance greater collegiality and support for schools.
- Promote ACCS school competitions and other events which enhance student and parent voice, debating etc.
- Review ACCS Newsletter content and style – circulate in both digital and hard copy and review the circulation list to include all stakeholders and other relevant organisations working with schools.
- Showcase ACCS publications e.g., Student Voice Journal, Blended Learning Guidelines.
- Develop a biannual Promoting Schools event to share ideas on successful approaches to PR in C&C schools.
- Manage ACCS website data to establish and evaluate effectiveness as a relevant and useful resource for schools.
- Build Social Media presence to promote ACCS themes, schools and events.
- Promote ACCS engagement in European and Global Initiatives where time and resources allow: e.g. Membership of EFEE, Involvement with Erasmus Projects, OECD and EU Commission projects.

## List of ACRONYMS

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
AJP	Association of Joint Patrons
APTCS	Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools
BOM	Board of Management
C&C	Community and Comprehensive
CEP	Catholic Education Partnership
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRA	Charities Regulator Authority
CS	Community School
CSL	Centre for School Leadership
DE	Department of Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EFEE	European Federation of Education Employers
ETBI	Education & Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
FESU	Further Education Support Unit
FSSU	Financial Support Services Unit
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISM	In-School Management
JMB	Joint Managerial Board
MS 365	Microsoft 365
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCPPP	National Council of Public-Private Partnerships
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPPS	Online Patronage Process System
PACCS	Parents Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SCA	State Claims Agency
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCos	Special Education Needs Coordinators
SFAE	Self-Financing Part-time Adult Education Programmes
SPU	Schools Procurement Unit