

Admissions Challenges, St. Patrick's National School

Dear Parent,

We are writing to let you know about the admissions challenges we face at St. Patrick's National School. These are particularly relevant if you are intending to have your child admitted to our junior infants' class in September 2022 or indeed in subsequent years. We want to inform you as fully as possible so that you can make decisions that are in the best interests of your child and your family.

What are these admissions challenges?

You may be aware already that the School has been oversubscribed for junior infant enrolments for a number of years. St. Patrick's is a three stream school and we have attempted to cope with the demand for junior infant places by taking in four classes in some years by using the School library as a classroom and renting temporary space for classrooms. However, we have reached the limit of our capacity and although we are taking in four junior infant classes this coming September, we have some 30 applicants on our waiting list.

One of the consequences of the pressure on places, is that our cut-off date for junior infant enrolment is getting earlier. The date of enrolment of our youngest pupil in junior infants has moved from four years of age in the June prior to starting school to four years in December. The trend has been particularly acute in the last three years, moving from February 22nd to December 23rd (see table attached). This increasing age of admission could have implications for subsidised pre-school education as children who have completed two years pre-school may find they have no place in junior infants the following September.

The Board of Management has engaged with the Department of Education and Skills directly and has also actively engaged with local representatives to seek their support in dealing with our admissions challenges. The Department has agreed in principle to expand the School to four streams and also to accommodate four special needs classrooms. However, this expansion cannot take place until the Department acquires the plot of land (the "field") immediately adjacent to the School. We have recently been advised that an 'agreement in principle' to purchase the field has been agreed with the Department of Education and Park Developments. We have no indication as to when this purchase will be made.

St. Patrick's NS operates under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and we and St. Mochta's NS are the two schools with a Catholic ethos in the Parish of St. Mochta. In common with all primary schools in the Diocese, St. Patrick's will give priority in admissions applications to children living in the Parish and strictly on an age basis, with older children receiving priority over younger children. Applications for children who already have a sibling in the School are covered under this Diocesan policy and are not permitted to receive preference over other older applicants.

What is the Board of Management doing and what can we as parents do?

The Board of management will continue to press the Department of Education and Skills to expand the School to four streams as a matter of urgency. The Board will also continue engaging with local representatives and the Diocese to ensure every effort is made at Department and Ministerial level to expedite the development programme for St. Patrick's.

While we would like to be able to offer places to all junior infant applicants from 2022 onwards, all the indications are that we will not be able to do so. As a parent and a member of our local community there are a number of areas where you can get directly involved:

- You can make your voice heard and make contact with the local representatives and explain how these admissions challenges are impacting on you and your family.
- You can engage with St. Patrick's Parents Association, who have been a great support to the School over the years and a powerful advocate for parents of our pupils.
- When applying for a place in junior infants for your child in St. Patrick's, please consider also applying to other schools in the Parish and in neighbouring parishes; this will not impact on your child being offered a place in St. Patrick's but it may improve their chances of being offered a school place when they are ready to start school.

These admissions challenges are outside the immediate control of St. Patrick's management team and the School's Board of Management, but please be assured that we are doing everything in our power to meet the needs of our local community. We are committed to getting these admissions challenges resolved to the fullest extent possible and very much welcome your support in this.

We want to bring these admissions challenges to your attention now so that you can give them your consideration prior to the opening of the admissions process for 2022.

John Conway
Chairperson, Board of Management

TABLE SHOWING NUMBER OF CLASSES AND CUT-OFF DATES SINCE 2010

School Year	Number of Junior Infant Classes Admitted	Cut-off Date (Date of Birth of Youngest Child Admitted)
2010-11	3	June 28 2006
2011-12	3	May 11 2007
2012-13	3	June 19th 2008
2013-14	3	April 23 2009
2014-15	4	April 21 2010
2015-16	3	March 22nd 2011
2016-17	3	April 3rd 2012
2017-18	4	April 3rd 2013
2018-19	4	February 1st 2014
2019-20	4	February 22nd 2015
2020-21	4	January 01 2016
2021-22	4	December 23 2016

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

If St. Patrick's is a three stream school, how is it you have taken in four junior infant classes in some years?

St. Patrick's was designed to be a three stream school, with an intake of three junior infant classes each year. It was built with 24 classrooms, three rooms for each of the eight years, from Junior Infants to Sixth Class. Since the school was built in 2006, two extensions comprising four additional classrooms have been added. This has allowed the school to take in four junior infant classes in some years. This year a temporary classroom was added, giving us a total of 29 classrooms. Classrooms are freed up each year when the sixth class finishes and make way for the new intake of junior infants. However, in a year when the school has three sixth classes finishing up, we can only take in three junior infant classes.

What plans does the Department of Education and Skills have for St. Patrick's?

The Department has agreed in principle to expand St. Patrick's to a four stream school. This will require the addition of four more permanent classrooms giving us 32 in all. The Department has also indicated an intention to include 4 special education classrooms in this expansion.

Is there room on the school site to accommodate these expansion plans?

The short answer is no. There is a piece of land beside the school known as "the field" and it is owned by Park Developments. At the request of the school, Park Developments has given the School and Diswellstown Community and Recreation Centre an annual licence to use this field as a play area (the licence has been granted again for another year to June 2022). The purchase of this site has been agreed in principle between the DES and Park Developments. In order for the school to be extended to meet the Department's proposal, the purchase of the site will need to be completed in full.

When will the field be purchased for St. Patrick's?

Agreement in principle for the purchase of the site has been reached. St. Patrick's is not a party to these negotiations, but the Board of Management has stressed the importance of the field to the future expansion of the School, both to the Department and to Park Developments. The Board of Management has also engaged with local political representatives to add their voice in support of the school. We do not know when this agreement will be brought to a successful conclusion.

Has there been a change in the admissions policy in relation to siblings?

For several years prior to 2021, St. Patrick's and St. Mochta's schools operated a joint admissions policy. Generally speaking, for children living in the Parish of St. Mochta, those living on roads near St. Patrick's were admitted to St. Patrick's and likewise those living on roads near St. Mochta's were admitted to St. Mochta's. Provided they were born before the cut-off date, children who had a sibling in one school were given preference for that school.

All primary schools were required to review their admissions policy for entry in 2021 and subsequent years. It was evident to the Board of Management, that the old policy of managing admissions on a road basis was no longer feasible, owing to the significant growth

in housing near St. Patrick's. Therefore, St. Patrick's and St. Mochta's decided that the joint policy approach should not be continued and the fairest way to manage admissions should be on an age basis for residents of St. Mochta's Parish. This also meant that the preference given to siblings under the joint policy would not continue. It is also policy of the Archdiocese of Dublin (the Patron of St. Patrick's) that junior infant admissions are to be managed on an age basis, with older children ranking ahead of younger children, irrespective of whether an applicant has a sibling in the school.

What is the position in relation to the resolution of the pyrite problem in St. Patrick's?

Shortly after the new school building was completed, it was noticed that the ground floors within the building and the hard surfaces outside the building, were being affected by pyrite contamination. This is a mineral that when present in the filling under the hard surface causes the contaminated material and consequently the flooring to rise upwards. The Department of Education is pursuing the matter with the contractor and to date has been rectifying problems as they arise. The Board of Management and School Management is dissatisfied with the slow rate of progress in resolving this issue and we are pressing the Department to implement a comprehensive remediation plan urgently.