

ETHOS SSE IN EDUCATE TOGETHER SCHOOLS - HANDBOOK

Extract from the Ethos SSE in Educate
Together Schools Handbook 2021



EQI

Centre for Evaluation,
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Extract from Ethos SSE in Educate Together Schools Handbook.

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Quality Framework for Ethos in Educate Together Schools

The quality assurance of the Educate Together ethos across the national network of schools is multifaceted, and therefore a framework of support is required. The quality framework includes the core aspects of an overall system of support and guidance for schools. It also helps schools to understand, implement, evaluate and promote the Educate Together ethos. The quality framework for ethos in Educate Together schools includes the following core elements:

- Educate Together Charter (for primary and post-primary schools);
- The ethos quality standards and statements of effective practice;
- The ethos self-evaluation process;
- Educate Together national supports for ethos.

The implementation of the quality framework is also dependent on a number of school context factors which include:

- The centrality of the Educate Together ethos among members of the school community;
- The school organisational factors;
- Leadership of the SSE process.

Together, these elements help to ensure that the Educate Together ethos underpins the values, beliefs and practices within all Educate Together schools.

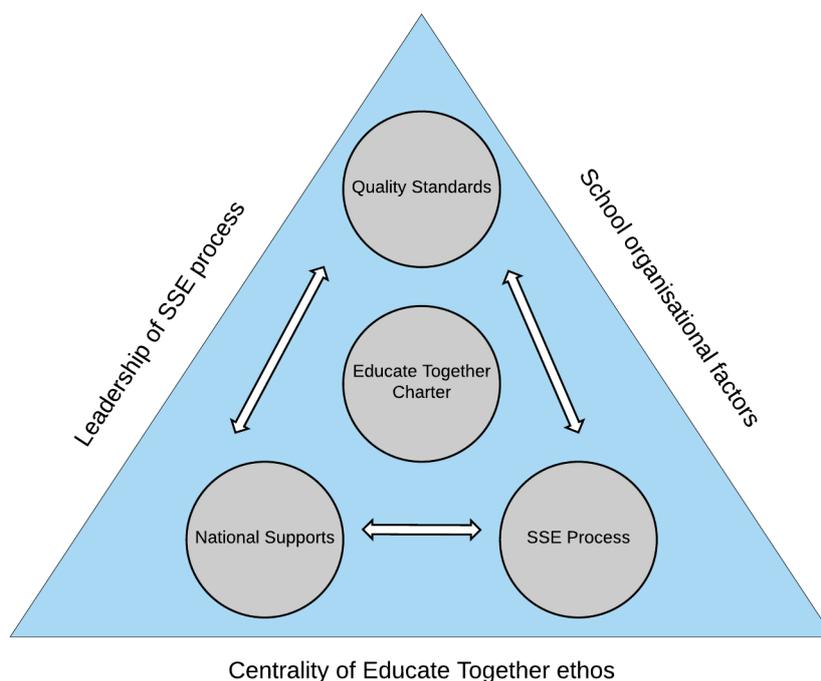


Figure 1: Quality Framework for Ethos in Educate Together Schools

At the centre of the quality framework is the Educate Together Charter which informs each of the other elements. The quality standards and the statements of effective practice provide an outline of what school communities should be aiming for in terms of implementing the Educate Together ethos.

Under the direction of the board of management and principal, the school can self-evaluate its own practice against the standards and statements of practice, following the guidelines provided. The Educate Together national office, through the ethos guidance platform alongside support from staff provides more detailed guidance and support to schools on the implementation of the Educate Together ethos at school level.

In addition, a number of factors at school level will significantly impact on the implementation of the ethos. Of most importance is the centrality of the Educate Together ethos to members of the school community. Is the ethos at the heart of policy and practice in the school? Among members of the school community, is there a shared understanding of what the Educate Together ethos means in practice? These are key questions for a school to consider. Good practice and shared understandings will not happen by chance. Rather, they should be planned for within the organisation of the school year. This involves ensuring that ethos is formally discussed at meetings, that time and resources are set aside for the SSE process and the implementation of actions. It also means that there is planned consultation and communication in relation to ethos, with members of the school community.

Leadership of the SSE process is a key aspect of this particular model, and therefore, a fundamental feature in the development of this framework was the provision of training and support to the individual staff member in each school who was selected to lead the SSE Team and the process in the school. The training focused on ensuring the SSE Team leader was clear about how to lead a team and a school community through each step of the SSE process. The pilot process informed the further refinement of these guidelines with the aim of guiding schools to undertake ethos SSE independently.

Quality standards for ethos

The declared ethos of all Educate Together schools is articulated in the Educate Together Charter where it states that Educate Together schools are:

Equality-based i.e. all children/ learners having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected.

Child-centred/ learner-centred in their approach to education.

Co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities.

Democratically run with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers.

Note: The term 'child' is used for primary schools and 'learner' for post-primary schools.

A key purpose of the Charter is to deliberately stipulate that which is fundamental to all Educate Together schools and to encourage the school community to think and act in a particular way. The board of management of the school is committed to ensuring that this ethos is delivered. The formal expression of ethos as stated in the Charter should be reflected in the lived experience of students in the school and expressed through the curriculum, activities, interactions and behaviours. A school's ethos can also be felt through the general atmosphere of the school as perceived by members of the

school community and visitors to the school. In this way, the ethos of an Educate Together school impacts significantly on the kind of education delivered to its students.

The ethos of an Educate Together school is central to how it operates and should be the starting point for all decision making at a whole school, classroom and individual level. However, the application of the stated ethos should never be taken for granted as there is likely to be ongoing tension between the 'intended ethos' and the 'experienced ethos'. Therefore, developing and living the Educate Together ethos should be discussed, considered, planned for, applied, monitored and evaluated. This may involve the entire school community, to varying degrees. The Quality Framework aims to provide schools with a clear process for ensuring that the Educate Together ethos remains integral to the operation of the school.

School ethos generally refers to the core shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of an educational community.

The development of the quality standards and the pilot phase

The development of the quality standards for ethos in Educate Together schools began in 2019 and involved widespread consultation with various stakeholders. The Dublin City University, Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection conducted interviews with key personnel in the national Educate Together office as well as a focus group with members of the Board of Directors. This led to the development of draft quality standards and statements of effective practice. Two national consultation meetings followed, in Cork and Dublin which were attended by representatives of 7 primary and 3 second-level schools (see Appendix A). Participants in these full-day meetings included, students, teachers, deputy principals, principals, parents and board of management representatives. The meetings involved active participation in a range of activities which encouraged attendees to focus on the meaning of ethos and to give feedback on the wording of the draft standards and statements of effective practice. Following the consultation meetings, the draft standards and statements of effective practice were revised and were circulated to all Educate Together primary and post-primary schools nationally. Feedback was received from 13 schools which was used to further refine the draft documents in advance of the pilot phase. Following which, the draft standards and statements for effective practice were updated as outlined in the following section. The standards and statements of effective practice were brought to the 2021 Educate Together Annual General Meeting for ratification by members and were passed unanimously.

Twenty-one schools (see Appendix B) participated in the pilot phase of the initiative, which involved the provision of training to the SSE team leader from each of the participating schools. Detailed guidelines and four training sessions were provided over the course of the 2019/20 academic year by Dublin City University, Centre for Evaluation Quality and Inspection. The training was designed to support schools one step at a time. Each session prepared the participant to implement the next stage of the process back in their school. The model encouraged wide consultation with representatives of the school community. A wide range of online surveys /tools were made available to participants to assist them in gathering data and which could be edited as required.

Quality Standards and Statements of Practice

Domain		Standard
1.	Equality	All students are afforded equality of esteem in all aspects of school life, where individual difference and diversity is recognised, mutually respected, and welcomed.
2.	Ethical Education	The Educate Together Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is effectively planned and delivered in a collaborative, coordinated and cohesive manner.
3.	Child/Learner-centred	The school provides a child/learner-centred experience
4.	Democratic Structures	Formal democratic structures operate within the school involving key stakeholder groups at various levels, for the benefit of the school and its students.
5.	Participation	The school promotes the participation of key stakeholders in the life of the school.
6.	Sustainable Practice	Sustainable practice is promoted across the school community.

Domain 1: Equality

Standard: All students are afforded equality of esteem in all aspects of school life, where individual difference and diversity is recognised, mutually respected, and welcomed.

	Statements of Effective Practice	Statements of Highly Effective Practice
1(a)	The school community generally acknowledge the diversity that makes up the school community and the range of identities among its members including: age; belief system; dis/ability; ethnicity; family type; gender; religious background; sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.	The school community fully acknowledge the diversity that makes up the school community and the range of identities among its members including: age; belief system; dis/ability; ethnicity; family type; gender; gender identity; religious background; sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.
1(b)	The school management establishes and maintains a positive and inclusive school climate, where members of the school community are welcomed, where rights are respected and promoted, and where members feel safe (physically, emotionally, socially). All members of the school community are responsible for contributing to a positive school climate. All members of the school community are addressed by their first name.	The school management establishes and maintains a very positive and very inclusive school climate, where all members of the school community are welcomed, where rights are respected and actively promoted, and where members feel safe (physically, emotionally, socially). All members of the school community are responsible for contributing to a positive school climate. All members of the school community are addressed by their first name.
1(c)	The physical environment of the school reflects the school's values of equality, diversity, participation, access, and respect, as can be seen in: physical access to all areas, the choice of teaching resources, and the visual images and displays throughout the school (limitations of temporary accommodation are acknowledged).	The physical environment of the school consistently reflects the school's values of equality, diversity, participation, access, and respect, as can be seen in: physical access to all areas, the choice of teaching resources, and the visual images and displays throughout the school (limitations of temporary accommodation are acknowledged).
1(d)	The school community actively promotes the development of social and emotional competencies among students, such as fairness, kindness, caring, respect, solidarity, compassion, and concern for others.	The school community develops social and emotional competencies among all students, such as fairness, kindness, caring, respect, solidarity, compassion, and concern for others.
1(e)	The admissions policy and procedures reflect the equality-based ethos in that the admissions process is fair and equitable. The admissions processes are transparent and relatively easy to navigate and where possible, supports are provided to students	The admissions policy and procedures reflect the equality-based ethos in that the admissions process is fair and equitable. The admissions processes are transparent and easy to navigate and supports are provided to students and families who may otherwise find the admission process challenging. Specific

	and families who may otherwise find the admissions process challenging.	outreach initiatives are in place to ensure the local community of the school are aware of admission procedures.
1(f)	The school makes reasonable efforts to ensure access for all students and their families to a range of information and support and to participate in relevant aspects of school life. Generally, members of the school community positively identify with the school and high levels of participation in school life are encouraged. Differentiated supports are generally provided, in so far as it is possible, to those who need them so as to ensure the participation of all students and their families.	The school consistently ensures access for all students and their families to a range of information and support and to participate in relevant aspects of school life. Members of the school community positively identify with the school and very high levels of participation in school life are encouraged. Differentiated supports are consistently provided, in so far as it is possible, to those who need them so as to ensure the participation of all students and their families.
1(g)	The school is co-educational and committed to encouraging all students to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities. School leadership promotes gender equality in the provision of opportunities/ subject choices for students, encouraging them to explore their full range of abilities/ career options regardless of their gender or gender identity. Measures are taken to value and celebrate the range of student talents, efforts and achievements.	The school is co-educational and consistently encourages all students to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities. School leadership purposefully promotes gender equality in the provision of opportunities/ subject choices for students, encouraging them to explore their full range of abilities/ career options regardless of their gender or gender identity. Effective measures are taken to value and celebrate the range of student talents, efforts and achievements.
1(h)	Gender equality is promoted across the curriculum and in the choice of teaching and learning materials. It is specifically addressed as part of the Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum where gender issues, gender stereotypes, bias and expectations are addressed.	Gender equality is purposefully fostered across the curriculum and in the choice of teaching and learning materials. It is specifically addressed as part of the Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum where gender issues, gender stereotypes, bias and expectations are addressed.
1(i)	Staff generally promote values and actions which challenge gender inequalities and the ways gender interacts with other inequalities. Staff are mindful of gender issues in the language they use and in their expectations for learners.	All staff actively promote values and actions which challenge gender inequalities and the ways gender interacts with other inequalities. Staff are mindful of gender issues in the language they use and in their expectations for learners.

Domain 2: Ethical Education

Standard: The Educate Together Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is effectively planned and delivered in a collaborative, coordinated, and cohesive manner.

	Statements of Effective Practice	Statements of Highly Effective Practice
2(a)	The Educate Together Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum is delivered as a fundamental aspect of the overall curriculum of the school and is promoted and monitored by the principal and board of management.	The Educate Together Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum is consistently and effectively delivered as a fundamental aspect of the overall curriculum of the school and is promoted and monitored by the principal and board of management.
2(b)	Responsibility for the coordination of the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is established in the school. Training and resources are provided to support staff responsible for coordination.	Responsibility for the coordination of the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is established in the school. Training and resources are provided to support staff responsible for coordination to effectively carry out their role.
2(c)	Members of the school community participate in local and national training / information events, including with other Educate Together schools, to develop the capacity of the school to implement the Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum. Teachers feel confident in their ability to plan for and teach the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum.	Members of the school community participate in local and national training / information events, including with other Educate Together schools, to develop the capacity of the school to implement the Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum. On an ongoing basis , teachers feel confident in their ability to plan for and teach the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum.
2(d)	All teachers receive induction on the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum.	All teachers receive comprehensive induction in relation to the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum.
2(e)	Teachers collaborate to develop a documented plan for the delivery of the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum, including coordinated and cohesive planning for each year group (on an individual school or on a cluster basis). The plan incorporates all strands of the curriculum, outlining how they will be taught and assessed. The involvement of parents/guardians and other members of the community in the delivery is included as appropriate. The plan is shared with the school community.	Teachers collaborate to develop a documented plan for the delivery of the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum, including coordinated and cohesive planning for each year group (on an individual school or on a cluster basis). The plan incorporates all strands of the curriculum, outlining how they will be taught and assessed. The involvement of parents/guardians and other members of the community in the delivery is included as appropriate. The plan is shared with the school community, its implementation is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is current and the plan is updated to reflect new developments and training.

2(f)	<p>In addition to timetabled classes, the implementation of the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is integrated into the overall curriculum of the school. The Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is referred to at assemblies and other relevant events and activities of the school.</p>	<p>In addition to timetabled classes, the implementation of the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is consistently and purposefully integrated into the overall curriculum of the school. The Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum is referred to at assemblies and other relevant events and activities of the school.</p>
2(g)	<p>The Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum is taught in an engaging and supportive learning environment, where students are encouraged to gain personal understandings, evaluate information, and respectfully articulate opinions. A range of quality resources are developed and used. Displays and images throughout the school promote the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum and the related work of students.</p>	<p>The Ethical Education/Learn Together curriculum is taught in an engaging and supportive learning environment, where students are encouraged to gain personal understandings, evaluate information, respectfully articulate opinions and extend the learning beyond the classroom. A wide range of high-quality resources are developed and used. Displays and images throughout the school promote the Ethical Education/ Learn Together curriculum and the related work of students.</p>

Domain 3: Child-centred / Learner-centred		
Standard: The school provides a child/learner-centred experience		
	Statements of Effective Practice	Statements of Highly Effective Practice
3(a)	The best interests of students are considered in decisions made by staff and management of the school.	The best interests of all students are systematically considered in decisions made by staff and management of the school.
3(b)	In as far as it is possible, the school curriculum provides for the holistic needs of students, reflecting differences in need, interests, and abilities.	In as far as it is possible, the school curriculum provides for the holistic needs of students, reflecting differences in need, interests, and abilities so that all students experience learning that is valuable and challenging.
3(c)	The school fosters a supportive and caring environment where students are expected to work, develop, and achieve to the best of their abilities. New students feel welcomed in the school, and systems are in place to support new students to settle in and develop positive peer relationships.	The school provides a supportive and caring environment where students are expected to work, develop, and achieve to the best of their abilities. New students feel very welcomed in the school, systems are in place to support new students to settle in and develop positive peer relationships.
3(d)	Students are known as individuals and feel supported and listened to at a whole school and classroom level. Student voice is promoted through formal democratic structures, and participative processes.	Students are known as individuals and feel supported and authentically listened to at a whole school and classroom level. Student voice is experienced through formal democratic structures, and participative processes.
3(e)	The school community develops an overall approach to wellbeing that supports students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for wellbeing. Parents/guardians are informed about their child's progress, achievements, and welfare.	The school community develops a comprehensive approach to wellbeing that supports students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for wellbeing. Parents/guardians are informed about their child's progress, achievements, and welfare.
3(f)	There is no compulsory uniform imposed on the student body.	There is no compulsory uniform imposed on the student body.
3(g)	The school is learner-centred in its approach to teaching and learning. See: Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary/ Post-Primary Schools (DES Inspectorate, 2016). Standards and Statements of (Effective) Practice for Teaching and Learning.	The school is learner-centred in its approach to teaching and learning. See: Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary/ Post-Primary Schools (DES Inspectorate, 2016). Standards and Statements of (Highly Effective) Practice for Teaching and Learning.

Domain 4: Democratic Structures

Standard: Formal democratic structures operate within the school involving key stakeholder groups at various levels, for the benefit of the school and its students.

	Statements of Effective Practice	Statements of Highly Effective Practice
4(a)	The school is formally managed by the board of management according to the structures and procedures set out for each school type. The board upholds the ethos, as set out by the patron/s, the discourse of which permeates the work of the board and is given due consideration in the decisions of the board. A strong working partnership exists between the board of management, parent association/ parent-teacher association, and student council/assembly. The approach to management and leadership is collaborative.	The school is formally managed by the board of management according to the structures and procedures set out for each school type. The board fully understands and upholds the ethos, as set out by the patron/s, the discourse of which permeates the work of the board and is given due consideration in the decisions of the board. A very strong and productive working partnership exists between the board of management, parent association/ parent-teacher association, and student council/assembly. There is clear evidence of a collaborative approach to management and leadership.
4(b)	The board of management consults with members of the school community in the development of policies as appropriate and practicable.	The board of management effectively consults with members of the school community in the development of policies as appropriate and practicable .
4(c)	A student council/assembly is established and operates according to good practice guidelines in order to maintain a structured partnership with school management, staff, and parents/guardians for the benefit of the school and its students. Training and support are provided to student council/assembly members.	A student council/assembly is established and operates according to good practice guidelines in order to maintain an active and constructive partnership with school management, staff, and parents/guardians for the benefit of the school and its students. Effective training and support are provided to student council/assembly members so that they can confidently carry out their role.
4(d)	A parent association/ parent-teacher association is established and operates according to good practice guidelines to build a constructive partnership between home and school.	A parent association/ parent-teacher association is established and operates according to good practice guidelines to build and maintain a constructive and effective partnership between home and school.
4(e)	There is an understanding of barriers to the participation of underrepresented groups in the formal democratic processes of the school and measures are taken to support participation as a result.	There is an understanding of barriers to the participation of underrepresented groups in the formal democratic processes of the school and systematic measures are in place to address such barriers and support participation.
4(f)	The school engages members of the school community as appropriate in school self-evaluation and school improvement planning. The board of management informs the school	The school usefully and purposefully engages members of the school community as appropriate in school self-evaluation and school improvement planning. The board of management regularly informs the school community and

	community and the patron/s, about the implementation of school improvement plans.	the patron/s, about the implementation of school improvement plans.
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Domain 5: Participation

Standard: The school promotes the participation of key stakeholders in the life of the school.

	Statements of Effective Practice	Statements of Highly Effective Practice
5(a)	The school curriculum integrates opportunities for all students to learn about and experience democratic processes as a norm. Students are empowered to develop skills of listening, questioning, and respectful dialogue in order to develop as informed, responsible, and participative members of society.	The school curriculum integrates opportunities for all students to learn about and experience democratic processes as a norm. Students are empowered to develop skills of listening, questioning, and respectful dialogue in order to develop as informed, responsible, and participative members of society. Students are provided with opportunities to lead initiatives in the school.
5(b)	Staff are strongly supported and affirmed in their roles and have a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for the school.	Staff are strongly supported and affirmed in their roles and have a strong sense of ownership and collective responsibility for the school.
5(c)	The school provides opportunities for all stakeholders to develop a sense of belonging to the school and the Educate Together network through participation in events and processes.	The school maximises opportunities for all stakeholders to develop a sense of belonging to the school and the Educate Together network through participation in events and processes.
5(d)	Relevant information is communicated between stakeholder groups, enhancing transparency and trust. The school communicates clear expectations for the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholder groups. Opportunities for parents/guardians to meet with staff are provided, following protocols outlined by the school management.	Relevant information is effectively communicated between stakeholder groups, enhancing transparency and trust. The school communicates very clear expectations for the role and responsibilities of the key stakeholder groups. Opportunities for parents/guardians to meet with staff are provided, following protocols outlined by the school management
5(e)	The school, through the board of management, participates as a member of Educate Together by attending membership meetings, thereby contributing to the direction of the organisation.	The school, through the board of management, actively participates as a member of Educate Together by attending membership meetings and thereby productively contributing to the direction of the organisation.

Domain 6: Sustainable Practice

Standard: Sustainable practice is promoted across the school community.

	Statements of Effective Practice	Statements of Highly Effective Practice
6(a)	The school encourages and models environmentally sustainable practices in all aspects of school life.	The school implements environmentally sustainable practices in all aspects of school life.
6(b)	The school teaches Education for Sustainability as part of the Learn Together/Ethical Education curriculum.	The school teaches Education for Sustainability as part of the Learn Together/Ethical Education curriculum and purposefully promotes the application of learning beyond the classroom.
6(c)	The UN Sustainable Development Goals are visible and promoted in the school.	The UN Sustainable Development Goals are visible and actively promoted in the school.