

Educate Together to open first UK school

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The Irish-based educational charity [Educate Together](#) has announced it is to set up an Academy Trust to run a new primary school to be opened in Bristol in September 2014. Schools under the Educate Together banner guarantee equality of access and esteem to children irrespective of their social, cultural or religious background.

The Academy Trust has been set up as a partnership between UK-based educationalists and Educate Together and will operate as a not-for-profit charity regulated by the Department for Education (DfE). It will be bound by the same human rights and equality principles as the Irish organisation.

The Irish charity has its roots in the Dalkey School Project founded in 1975, which was set up to challenge the divisive denominational nature of the Irish school system by educationalists and parents who recognised the need to have children of Catholic, Protestant and other parents educated together. Educate Together schools promote "a philosophy of education in which no child is considered an outsider."

In place of traditional religion education, Educate Together schools teach the [Learn Together ethical education](#) curriculum. The curriculum focuses on questions of equality, justice, sustainability and active citizenship. The subject aims to "develop in children a critical knowledge, understanding and awareness of the teachings of religious and non-theistic belief systems and how these systems relate to our shared human experience." Its teaching emphasises "the infinite variety and richness of humankind through nurturing a respect for a person's right to hold and practice individual belief systems and through creating spaces where values can be articulated and critically examined."

Educate Together schools have proved very popular amongst parents in Ireland where the charity has become the lead provider of new schools, opening 41 new primaries in the past ten years. Its model is seen to be particularly appropriate to rapidly growing urban areas with high levels of social, cultural or religious diversity.

Among the supporters of the Educate Together Academy Trust are Zenna Atkins, former Chairperson of Ofsted and Mary O'Rourke, ex-Tánaiste and Minister of Education in Ireland.

Speaking about the announcement, Paul Rowe, CEO of Educate Together said:

"We are delighted to work with our partners within Educate Together Academy Trust in the development of this school. The intention is to start this school as an outstanding learning environment from its outset. The school will incorporate our Learn Together ethical education curriculum and our child-centred ethos."

"Our colleagues in England are confident that this is the start of a network of popular Educate Together schools that will develop in the UK over the coming years."

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, welcomed the prospect of Educate Together's influence in the UK, commenting: "The inclusiveness embodied in Educate Together's mission and values would make an ideal blueprint for all state funded schools in the UK. It offers a far more positive vision for education than the increasingly faith-based and sectarian model being

advocated by all main political parties through their support for 'faith schools'. Religious organisations too often see schools as a way to produce the next generation of believers, and there is nothing child-centred about that."

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