Managing Diversity
in Irish Primary Schools:
Recent Developments and Challenges

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1.　Introduction

In the past two decades Ireland has experienced a remarkable change in its migratory patterns. The country has shifted from large-scale emigration, which has characterized Irish development in the 18th and 19th centuries, to receiving a significant number of immigrants from a wide range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. In 2002 less than 6% of the resident population were born outside of Ireland. According to the 2006 Irish census, this number surpassed 10% (see Table 3 in appendix). While this trend was not especially striking relative to the situation observed in other European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands or France, where the ratios of accepted migrants were much higher, it still represented an unprecedented socio-economic transformation. Over a very short period of time, Ireland underwent a radical shift from a largely homogeneous society to a multicultural nation. This created new challenges for all sectors of the society, most noticeably for the segments responsible for the delivery of education, health and other social services. Emergence of ethnic and cultural diversity in education has been of particular importance for the national policy-makers as this dimension plays a critical role for social mobility and integration. The focus of this paper will be on how Irish primary schools manage cultural

diversity. The first section will present an overview of the immigration flows into Ireland, looking broadly at the demographic breakdown, settlement patterns and the difficulties migrants face. The second section will explore the challenges educational institutions have to deal with as they adjust to the new societal realities, examine some of the relevant policy mechanisms established for that purpose, and discuss main policy implications.

This paper is based in part on the information gathered during meetings with education stakeholders in Dublin in November, 2010.

2. Background: Immigration into Ireland

During the time of the economic boom in the latter half of the 1990's and the early years of the 21st century, immigrants came to Ireland seeking economic opportunities and political stability. While a large minority of migrants came from the UK, significant numbers also arrived from Poland, Lithuania, Nigeria and other African and Asian nations. Table 1 (see appendix) shows the breakdown by nationality and age group. It is interesting to note that in 2006, just over 7% of children aged 14 or under were non-Irish. Excluding the children of the UK nationals, the two largest groups were from Poland and Nigeria. The data of 2006 shows that Irish society was relatively young, with approximately 21% of the population under the age of 14. The corresponding proportion of the non-Irish population was smaller – only 12.7%.

A diversity of national origins obviously implied a range of languages and religious beliefs represented. According to official information (Dept. of Education and Science, 2007 & 2008) out of approximately 48,000 non-Irish pupils in primary and secondary schools in Ireland, close to 60% did not speak English as their mother tongue. In order to ensure that these students had sufficient language support to follow instruction in English, the education authorities had to dedicate additional human and material resources as well as put in place institutional structures to facilitate the acquisition of English within the school context.

The question of religious beliefs of incoming migrants takes on special importance in Ireland. The Irish school system is denominational and based on the patronage of the churches. The system assumes that pupils follow Roman Catholicism and religious education is one of the required elements of the school curriculum. However, in contrast to the native Irish population, many of immigrants in the country are not Catholics. Over 90% of Irish nationals declare themselves Catholic (see Table 2 in appendix), compared to only half of the non-Irish population. It is worth highlighting in this connection that over 5% of the migrants are Muslim and 4% are Orthodox.

More than 50% of migrants (the census of 2006) chose to settle in the metropolitan Dublin area. However, this information alone is of little help to the education authorities in their school planning and resource allocation. Migrant families are typically very mobile, and it is difficult to predict with accuracy their spatial distribution several years into the future. It is also difficult to estimate whether a migrant family will remain in the country or leave Ireland altogether. Finally, another challenge confronting education policy-makers is the lack of reliable data on the English proficiency of migrant children. In some cases parents may have very limited English competence; however, by the time their children reach school age, they can linguistically integrate easily into the community. Yet, it is also very common that immigrant children's English skills do not improve even after an extended period of residence in Ireland due to very limited interaction with the local community.

3. Overview of the Irish Education System

Several unique characteristics of the Irish system of education, tied to the nation's cultural and religious traditions, are important as they directly affect the experience of non-Irish children in the school communities, and play a pivotal role in the articulation of broader education polices. This section will focus on the structure of the education system and describe the implications of the religious patronage.

The national school system was established in 1831. One of the funda-
mental principles of the system was for the state to provide financial support
to regional organizations which sought to set up a public school. Typically,
the national government provided resources to a local patron who in
exchange agreed to establish an educational facility in accordance with the
regulations of the Commissioners of National Education. While on paper it
appeared largely a matter of administrative compliance, in practice the local
patron was in control of the management of the school. As most patrons
were religious leaders, schools became de facto denominational though the
state did not explicitly regulate a religious ethos.

While the budget for primary schools came increasingly from the state
coffers, as opposed to public donations, the schools themselves never became
'public' schools *per se*, in a sense that private entities, mainly religious ones,
were in charge of their administration. This paradoxical situation has contin-
ued until today. A vast majority of schools depend on the state support for
capital expenditures and teacher salaries, and are required to be in compli-
ance with the rules, curricula, and public examination practices set by the
government. Furthermore, practically all schools are governed by boards
where all relevant stakeholders are represented, i.e. school trustees, adminis-
trators, teachers, and parents. Yet, in the 2006–2008 period, as the system did
not have the capacity to absorb all migrant children into the established facil-
ities, emergency schools largely for non-Irish children needed to be set up
entirely under State ownership, as it proved very difficult to secure a patron.
This underscores the difficulty of increasing educational capacity within the
traditional scope of religious patronage, no matter how the actual manage-
ment practices have evolved.

Religious patronage remains especially prevalent at the primary school
level. Over 95% of national schools at this level have church patronage (Dept.
of Education and Skills, 2009). Despite the profound demographic change that
has marked Irish society recently this situation is not likely to change. A
nation-wide survey conducted in 2008 revealed that the support for denomi-

national schools remains strong. Over 40% of respondents stated that primary schools should be denominational, i.e. managed by the Catholic communities. However, approximately 80% welcomed the admission of non-Catholics into the system (*Irish Examiner*, 2008).

4.   Implications of Patronage

The debate on whether the tradition of religious patronage represents a hindrance to the integration of migrant children into the Irish educational milieu is ongoing. Irish primary and secondary schools are obliged to comply with the Education Act which stipulates that the schools have to disclose their admissions criteria. Schools, however, are allowed to offer preferential treatment to applicants on the basis of his/her religious faith, and refuse admission if it is believed that the presence of the pupil in question threatens the stated religious ethos of the institution (The Education Act, 1998). This policy is a matter of concern for many migrant families with primary school-age children whose religious ideologies may not be the same as those traditionally practiced in Ireland (predominantly Catholic).

Accommodating religious diversity in the educational milieu has become a critical issue for Irish policy-makers. It represents the fundamental conflict between the rights of denominational schools to enforce religious education and the constitutional right of pupils to engage in educational practices which do not violate their religious norms (Lodge, 2004). Faced with an influx of non-Catholic pupils school authorities have sought to solve this problem by administering a "pull-out" system, i.e. taking migrant children out of religion classes. This strategy, however, was problematic.

First of all, many schools were not given additional staff resources to supervise children during the "pull-out" sessions and, consequently, could not resort to this method. Improvised separation of largely Catholic Irish and non-Catholic migrant children by letting the latter sit in the back of the class during religious instruction created a disturbance in the classroom as these pupils were not engaged in any meaningful activity.

Another, and perhaps a more important problem, was that pulling migrant students out of class in practice labeled them as 'different' and made them self-conscious. While there is limited empirical data on the reaction of the migrant children, this problem has been flagged to Irish authorities by a number of experts, including The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2008). A physical separation from the mainstream pupil body, even temporary, creates a psychological barrier which may prevent migrant children from successfully integrating into the school community, enhancing their sense of alienation from their Irish peers.

Taking migrant children out of religion classes also did not address the challenge of providing an environment where these children were able to pursue education without undue Catholic influence. In practice, while excused from religious instruction *per se*, pupils were engaged in religious practices and ceremonies. Catholic ideology is reflected in many school activities such as preparations for First Confession; Communion, and Confirmation. For all practical purposes, withdrawing migrant children from these activities is not possible as they are closely woven into the fabric of the school life.

Recognizing the difficulty of accommodating religious diversity in denominational primary schools, education authorities in Ireland have taken concrete policy actions. The Department of Education and Skills has developed a long-range plan for the provision of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools, particularly in the areas with a significant migrant population (Dept. of Education and Skills, 2008). It remains to be seen however, if this plan will be carried out as contemplated, in view of Ireland's current financial difficulties.

Working in conjunction with the State education authorities, Educate Ireland is an umbrella organization of multi-denominational schools (58 schools as of January 2011). While efforts are being made to increase the number of multi-denominational schools, there is concern that such schools will come to be viewed as catering almost exclusively to the migrant community. This fear underscores the principal question of how to overcome the religious

divide: through segregation, i.e. setting up non-traditional, multi-denomina-
tional schools, or integration by introducing a quota of places reserved for
non-Catholic applicants in denominational schools, etc.

5. Challenges Facing Primary Schools

Apart from having a traditionally denominational nature, primary schools in
Ireland are facing a number of other challenges when striving to manage cul-
tural diversity among pupils. This section will examine the most significant
problem areas.

5. 1 Movement of Migrants

As is typically the case of immigrant populations elsewhere, migrant families
in Ireland are very mobile. Their residence within the country is directly
influenced by the availability of employment and affordable housing, and the
presence of a support network. During the years of strong economic growth,
most of the work opportunities existed in the industrial, urban areas, primar-
ily in the suburbs of Dublin. However, many migrants also settled in areas
where seasonal, farm work was available. The high rate of mobility presented
a serious problem not only for the education authorities but also for the
schools themselves. Policy makers found it increasingly difficult to assess the
amount of English language support assistance (this will be addressed in
more detail below) schools would require. At the same time, due to the unsta-
ble student population, teachers experienced problems with lesson planning,
organizing whole-school activities, and classroom management. Scoil Choilm
Primary School in the Dublin metropolitan area is one of the emergency
schools created in 2007 to meet the demand coming mainly from migrant
families concentrating in the area. The Principal of the school identified the
high attrition rate as one of the biggest barriers to the successful integration
of children into the school community (Lowe, 2010).

5. 2　English Language Support

Provision of language support is arguably one of the most complex areas. It involves a spectrum of issues from the assessment of potential language needs to teacher training, special curriculum development, skills assessment, creating opportunities of the meaningful involvement of parents, and the design of intercultural education.

5. 2. 1　Language Support System

In their efforts to help children acquire English skills, schools in Ireland follow essentially an immersion model, i.e. students are integrated into mainstream classes but receive additional language support as required. This model is prevalent in Europe (OECD, 2008). A comparative analysis of various approaches has been inconclusive (Christensen, 2007) but studies of achievement gaps between immigrant and non-immigrant pupils suggest that systematic language support programs can be very effective in reducing the linguistic disadvantage of the former group. Research comparing outcomes in Australia, Canada and Sweden (cited in Christensen, 2007) shows a number of critical factors which influence the success of the language support model:

- Ongoing and adequately funded programs with well-defined output expectations and understanding of the requirements of the learner populations.
- Provision of specialized training for teachers of immigrant children
- Close collaboration between language support teachers and regular classroom teachers.

Providing parallel classes in the mother tongue of the immigrant pupils has been attempted with success in several educational contexts, including in schools in Canada and Sweden. It is, however, not an option which can be contemplated within the Irish environment since primary schools face a very broad range of languages of origins represented. Budgetary limitations is also a major constraint.

5. 2. 2 Assessment of Language Needs

As mentioned earlier, making an accurate estimate of how much language support will be needed in a given school is exacerbated by the high attrition rate of ethnic children and by lack of reliable data. Education administrators in Ireland rely chiefly on the surveys which show the first language of prospective entrants; however, this information offers little help in determining whether the children possess sufficient English skills to follow classroom instruction. In many cases, authorities initially provide limited funding for additional ESOL staff based on past reports from the school. Schools then become eligible for more resources as they make a determination of the number of new pupils who require language assistance. Until recently each school was entitled to only two English language support teachers, regardless of the actual language needs of pupils. The government lifted this restriction and made a commitment to increase the number of language support teachers. Again, it remains to be seen whether this will become a reality in the current harsh economic climate. The Department of Education and Skills is taking a very clinical view of the resource allocation and will likely implement 'the-two -year rule' in relation to second language learners, i.e. allow additional language teaching staff for a maximum two-year period. Hiring teachers on short contracts results in quality issues. While this allows the government to minimize salary expenditure, it makes it more difficult for schools to attract better qualified candidates, to maintain a low turnover rate among the staff, and to assure consistency in language instruction delivery.

5. 2. 3 Parental Involvement

Lack of English language capacity among parents of migrant children presents not only a hurdle to any effort to have them successfully involved in the school community, but also even more importantly, poses a challenge to any actions school administrators take to improve the English competence of the children themselves. There is no sufficient empirical data to assess the scope of this problem but anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of primary

schools in and around Dublin single out migrant parents' lack of ability to communicate in English as a very critical issue. Scoil Choilm Primary School is a good case in point. The pupil population is overwhelmingly non-Irish with a large proportion of parents not able to sustain a conversation in English. The Principal highlighted the following resultant problems:

1. Engaging parents in the school community and ensuring a systematic dialogue between parents and teachers is very time-consuming. Many parents are unable to read the relevant documentation provided by the school and, consequently, cannot follow the established procedures.

2. In many cases, it is not simply competence in English but the basic literacy issues which prevent parents from meaningful involvement in school affairs. Under such circumstances, simplifying the written information or even translating it into the mother tongue of the migrant family is of little practical value. (Lowe, 2010)

Schools resort to various strategies to establish communication with non-English-speaking parents. Rather than rely on the written correspondence teachers make verbal announcements. Several schools have sought and obtained funding for ESL classes aimed at the parents of the migrant children (INTO, 2005, 2006).

Schools have also cooperated closely with Vocational Education Centers (VECs) which have been vested with authority by the government to provide English language instruction to refugees. At present, however, budgetary limitations allow VECs to offer classes to only 5% of migrants with identified language needs (Bearpark, 2010); thus their contribution continues to be relatively small.

Parents arriving in Ireland with primary-age children often lack familiarity with the complexity of the Irish education system. They are unsure of the choices at their disposal, particularly at the local level. The Department of Education and Skills has remedied this situation somewhat – as of 2007 written information about the main aspects of the education system in Ireland is available in Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, and other languages. In addition, the

Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of Ireland began to provide more detailed information about education options to refugees and asylum applicants.

At the local level, the inability to interact regularly with the teachers and participate in parent-teacher associations has made it difficult for the parents to follow their children's progress in class, voice school-related opinions, and react to concerns raised by the teachers. At the same time, lack of parental involvement imposes an additional burden on the teachers in their efforts to create a cohesive classroom environment. In many cases educators know very little about the prior schooling experience of the child or about his/her social past.

5. 3   Accommodating Socio-cultural Diversity

Provision of adequate language support to immigrant children is a necessary but in itself an insufficient measure to achieve integration in the educational context. When migrant children enter a classroom they are not only confronted by the challenges of functioning in a new language environment but also by a host of new social rules, expectations, and pre-conceived notions embraced by teachers and other stakeholders. Equipping migrant children with the skills necessary to facilitate their cultural integration is often perceived as more difficult than focusing on the linguistic aspects. Research shows that school administrators preferred to invest more resources into the development of systematic language support programs rather than into building a specific anti-racism framework, organizing intercultural events or promoting cultural and religious tolerance in other ways (Devine, 2005). Emphasis on language support stems in part from the existence of relevant official policies which provide schools with funding for additional teaching staff, etc. No specific guidelines to address socio-cultural dimensions of migrant integration have been formulated, and schools themselves are responsible for devising appropriate programs. Extra funding is made available only if a school receives the DEIS status (designated disadvantaged

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status) and is used mainly for after-school clubs, school lunches, initiatives to help get parents involved in the life of the school and education of their children etc.

This section will look at several components which have been highlighted as critical to promote socio-cultural integration.

5. 3. 1　Community Attitudes

Schools do not exist in societal vacuum. Migrant children are greatly affected not only by their in-school experiences but also by their perceptions of how society at large views them. Ensuring the support of the community, especially among parents of Irish children, is paramount to making the non-Irish children feel accepted and equal to their mainstream peers. This has not been an easy task in a traditionally Caucasian, homogeneous Irish society. Common perceptions persist that most non-Irish residents are non-white and this sets the background for racially-based assumptions. (In fact, according to the 2006 Census, while non-white nationals are more visible, they constitute a minority of new arrivals. Only about 143,000 migrants, i.e. approximately 32% of all non-Irish have stated their ethnicity as other than Caucasian (Census, 2006)).

Community perceptions based on stereotypes can produce alarming outcomes. When an emergency school was established in 2006 in Dublin and it became known that a large number of migrant children would be enrolled, the community reacted very negatively. Several prominent community opinion-makers spoke against the school, and many Irish parents looked for other alternatives for their children. As a result, the initial enrollment was overwhelmingly non-Irish: 85 out of 87 children were from immigrant families. They were bused to school from neighboring communities, a scene reminiscent of the school de-segregation measures taken in the American south in the 1960's. Obviously this environment was not conductive to instilling a sense of inclusiveness among migrant students. Interaction with the mainstream population was minimal, and the school was viewed as a a exclusive 'non-Irish territory.' Thus, reversing entrenched attitudes became an impor-

tant priority for the school management team (Lowe, 2011). The School has launched a number of initiatives to build stronger linkages with the local community by making their activities more public, holding open-day events, and establishing partnerships with local sports and other associations. Despite these efforts, progress to draw indigenous students has been slow. Today 265 pupils are enrolled in the school, with the non-Irish still representing close to 95%.

5. 4   Adapting the School Settings

The experience of many educational models, particularly in societies such as Canada and Australia which pursue a policy of multiculturalism, shows that acknowledging students' socio-cultural backgrounds is effective in promoting mutual awareness and integration. This can take the shape of the observance of special holidays important within the culture of origin for a large segment of pupils, promotion of cultural traditions at school fairs, music festivals, etc., and incorporating references to various cultures represented at school into the classroom activities. While schools have to comply with the national curriculum, education policy-makers have given school principals the authority to modify their institutional settings to recognize the diversity of the student population. This includes the right to close the school on a particular day outside the traditional pattern in observance of religious holidays, etc. Additionally, dress codes can be negotiated between the parents and school administration (in a clear contrast to the recent developments in France where in 2010 the government made it an offense for women to wear a face-covering burqa in public places).

5. 5   Teacher Training and Intercultural Education

Increased classroom diversity has introduced another professional dimension for teachers. Managing a culturally (and linguistically) heterogeneous classroom is a complex task, even for veteran educators. The changing classroom environment naturally had critical implications for both initial and in-service

teacher education. While intercultural education is not a required subject *per se* at the pre-service stage, more and more teacher colleges are offering it, focusing both on management skills ("managing an intercultural classroom", "problem-solving in a socially-diverse class") and on curriculum content ("world religions", etc.). Also, various modules of primary school teacher education, both at pre-service and in-service levels, incorporate elements of diversity training. For example, the in-service module on Social, Personal, and Health Education includes lectures on how to make children more interested in and more tolerant of other cultures (DES, 2008). All language support teachers receive training with a built-in intercultural dimension. NGOs and other service providers also contribute expertise in the area of multiculturalism (see Marino Institute of Education as example).

6.　Summary and Policy Implications

The years of unprecedented economic growth in the early 20th century in Ireland represented a remarkable phenomenon in the history of the country. In a space of less than a decade(!) the country completed the transformation from one of the poorest in Western Europe to one of the wealthiest. Consumer spending rose spectacularly as did the incomes. In the later 1980's the unemployment rate in Ireland stood at 18% (The Economist, 2010). By the end of 2007 it was 4.5%. Irish companies, particularly in the manufacturing and service sectors, were facing a serious labour shortage, and to fill the jobs the indigenous population was no longer willing to do they recruited heavily, especially in Eastern Europe.

　　　The historical trend of net emigration was reversed as Ireland became an increasingly attractive destination for immigrants. At the beginning of the 'Celtic Tiger Boom' migratory flows into Ireland were dominated by the Irish *diaspora* returning home. In 1997 half of the entrants were of Irish descent. By 2007 their ratio declined to less than 20%. (Smyth, 2009). A majority of migrants were arriving from the new EU member states. The transition from an English-speaking, culturally homogeneous nation to a multicultural,

multilingual society represented a psychological watershed. It permeated all aspects of life and governance in Ireland, from daily interactions, labour practices, and legal mechanisms to the institutional frameworks. It required the creation of a new policy environment in many social areas including education. This was a colossal challenge for the authorities. Considering a very short timeframe and the absence of a blueprint for action, the reaction of various stakeholders indicates that managing diversity at Irish schools has become an important priority. Processes to identify best practices have been put in place by the national policy-makers, the institutions themselves and NGOs. While the initiatives undertaken so far to overcome entrenched structural barriers and create a more welcoming school environment for migrant children have been largely positive, a number of areas require further regulatory scrutiny.

6. 1　Teacher Professional Development

ESL/EFL training, the focus of additional pre- and in-service developmental programs for teachers, should be supplemented by a range of other dimensions of intercultural education. In a number of surveys conducted in recent years teachers identified the establishment of a systematic training mechanism as an immediate priority to enable them to tackle challenges posed by diversity in the classroom in a professional manner. At present, most teachers in schools with non-Irish pupils have not completed any courses that deal with the aspects of intercultural education beyond language training. It is desirable for the Department of Education and Skills to design a comprehensive program addressing the immediate needs of teachers who find themselves in a very unfamiliar professional setting.

6. 2　Language Support for Migrant Parents and Children

As mentioned earlier, one of the problems in providing adequate English language support to migrant pupils is the absence of reliable data on the literacy levels and language needs of immigrants. The authorities need to develop a

systematic mechanism to evaluate the functional language abilities of the immigrant population. While it may be impossible to offer language training to all with legitimate needs for budgetary reasons, at the very least the government will be in the position to allocate the resources more efficiently.

Lack of parental involvement due to poor understanding of educational options and school rules can be remedied to some degree by a more systematic provision of language classes to parents, especially mothers who by and large are available to enroll in short term courses while their children are in school. Presently, schools, in collaboration with Vocational Education Centres (VECs) offer classes to parents; however the budgetary capacity remains very limited. The education authorities should play a more aggressive role in securing a sufficient budget for ongoing language instruction aimed specifically at bridging the linguistic divide between non-Irish parents and teachers. Focused programs offered in daytime would not only be beneficial from the educational point of view, but equally importantly, permit a greater degree of social integration.

6. 3 Support of the Culture and the Language of Origin

The question of how much support the government of Ireland will provide for the maintenance of the language and cultural traditions of migrants is bound to remain at the core of public debate, as the country adjusts to the new demographic reality. Having become a *de facto* multicultural nation, Ireland has to decide which policy it will follow vis-à-vis incoming migrants. One option is the path of assimilation characterized by the efforts to expedite migrants' adaptation to the Irish values and the prevalent societal norms. The other would be to pursue a model of multicultural integration in which the government puts in place policies aimed at ensuring respect for the cultural and linguistic identities of migrants.

Most of the West European nations, notably France and the Netherlands, chose the assimilation model partly in response to the strong influence of the right-wing political entities which advocate anti-immigrant policies (Yoffe,

2010). Proponents of this approach (see Ellian 2002 for the discussion of the situation in the Netherlands) claim that assimilation is the only viable way to foster patriotism, ensure cultural integration, and enhance a sense of belonging to the host community. On the other hand, supporters of the philosophy of multiculturalism often present the case of Canada as a success story (see Adams 2007; Kymlicka, 2010). Evidence does suggest (The Economist, 2006) that Canadians overwhelmingly support immigration; the rate of migrants' involvement in the nation's political life is high, and the indigenous population believe that newcomers should have the right to maintain their cultural and religious practices.

If Ireland chooses a multicultural approach in its efforts to accommodate diversity, it will require considerable financial expenditure. Specifically, with regard to education, measures should be taken to promote the survival of pupils' mother tongue(s). This would imply providing classes in the migrants' languages of origin, and establishing other mechanisms to allow them to retain their cultural identity. The politicians may be predictably weary of this approach as they would fear voter backlash when faced with competing demands for the limited resources. The government is especially sensitive to this scenario now as the country is essentially surviving thanks to the massive infusion of funds from the EU and IMF.

The policy of assimilation, while seemingly less politically explosive, presents other problems. If pressured to comply with new, different cultural norms, migrants may end up in the precarious position of abandoning their own set of values yet not feeling psychologically prepared enough to embrace a new identity. This may lead to identity loss and subsequently social alienation.

Ireland is standing at a policy crossroads now. The challenges of managing a multicultural, multiethnic society will not go away. The flow of immigrants has ebbed from the highs reached in 2005-2006 mainly as a result of the recent financial crisis but the overwhelming majority of those already in the country will likely stay and be part of Irish society for generations to

come. These challenges are compounded by the fact that the government will be forced to curtail many social services, including education-related ones, and the pressure to channel resources to areas of importance for the predominantly indigenous population will be great. Despite the occasional racist occurrences the sentiment of public debate in the media has been largely pro-immigrant. Perhaps this reflects the sense of duty many Irish feel after so many of their compatriots have been welcome as immigrants around the world for well over a century. At this point it is premature to make predictions about how the policy vis-à-vis immigrants will evolve in Ireland. The country has made very impressive strides in adjusting to the new social reality. It remains to be seen which path – that of assimilation or multicultural integration – the country will ultimately follow. The field of primary school education in Ireland as a microcosm of diversity management will continue to be of particular interest to Irish observers, language policy specialists and educators, and will warrant systematic scrutiny.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Table 1: Irish population, classified by nationality and age group, 2006

Nationality	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	Total Population
Total Irish	283,428	263,614	250,239	265,613	**3,706,683**
UK	2,528	5,773	7,350	6,506	**112,548**
EU15 excluding Ireland and UK	989	1,019	1,029	1,332	**42,693**
EU16 to EU25 Accession States	4,198	3,398	2,411	3,821	**120,534**
Other European Nationality	697	1,351	1,201	1,196	**24,425**
United States	926	1,365	1,244	836	**12,475**
Africa	1,430	3,593	2,624	2,141	**35,326**
Asia	1,484	2,242	1,771	1,556	**46,952**
Other Nationalities	861	1,226	1,248	1,259	**22,422**
Multi Nationality	183	205	154	110	**2,358**
No Nationality	253	81	63	64	**1,318**
Not Stated	3,706	3,446	3,166	2,687	**44,279**
Total	300,683	287,313	272,500	287,121	**4,172,013**

Source: http://www.cso.ie/census/census2006results/volume_4, table 36

Table 2: Irish population classified by religion and nationality, 2006 (% of total)

Religion	Irish	Non-Irish
Catholic	92.0	50.8
Church of Ireland (incl. Protestant)	2.3	7.4
Other Christian Religion	0.4	2.7
Presbyterian	0.4	1.8
Muslim (Islamic)	0.3	5.1
Orthodox	0.1	4.0
Methodist	0.1	1.3

Source: http://www.cso.ie/statistics/popnclassbyreligionandnationality2006.htm

Table 3: Irish population in 2002 and 2006 classified by nationality

Nationality	2002	%	2006	%
Irish	**3,584,975**	**92.9**	**3,706,683**	**88.8**
Non-Irish EU Nationals				
UK	103,476	2.7	112,548	2.7
Other EU15	29,960	0.8	42,693	1.0
EU16 to EU25 Accession States		0.0%	120,534	2.9
Total EU	**133,436**	**3.5**	**275,775**	**6.6**
Rest of the World (non-EU)				
Other European	23,105	0.6	24,425	0.6
USA	11,384	0.3	12,475	0.3
Africa	20,981	0.5	35,326	0.8
Asia	21,779	0.6	46,952	1.1
Other Nationalities	11,236	0.3	22,422	0.5
Multi/No Nationality	3,187	0.1	3,676	0.1
Not Stated	48,412	1.3	44,279	1.1
Total Non Irish*	**224,261**	**5.8**	**419,733**	**10.1**
Total Population	**3,858,495**	**100.0**	**4,172,013**	**100.0**

Adapted from: Smyth, E. et al (2009) "Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students" in *Research Series* No. 8, p.4

*Excludes "No Nationality" and "Not Stated".