



Lucan Educate Together National School

Parental Volunteer Policy

Effective from: 01/06/2015

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1. Introductory Statement

Welcome to Lucan Educate Together National School Parental Volunteer Policy.

This policy aims to govern the relationship between parents who provide volunteer services to our school, the teachers, children and Board of Management (BOM).

From the introduction of this policy, our school plans to achieve the following:

- Increase the number of parents participating as volunteers within our school.
- Identify the broad range of skills and resources available to our school through the parent community.
- Provide clear principles and guidelines which will give parents, teachers and children a sense of clarity on the role of the volunteer within the school.
- Formulate a consistent approach for dealing with volunteers within our school.
- Control access to sensitive or personal information.
- Encourage parents of new children attending the school to volunteer.
- To ensure our teachers and children are aware of the volunteers working within our school environment.
- Build up a sense of community and ownership for the school with the volunteer and parent population.
- Provide the BOM with a pool of resources to assist in the management of the school.

We believe that this policy will positively affect teaching and learning by providing a framework that will provide a sense of ownership for the running and wellbeing of our school. This will be shared between the parent and teacher communities. In addition, the organisation of the school will be positively affected as the BOM will have a pool of resources at our school's disposal, who have willingly volunteered to provide expertise and time in a range of areas.

2. School Committees

2.1. Executive Committee

The Executive is responsible for providing the buildings for the school and is the caretaker of the ethos of the school.

The members of LETNS Ltd. elect a committee at an Annual General Meeting for a one year term (membership of LETNS Ltd. costs €1 annually). This executive committee acts as Patron for the school. Having our own patronage means any day to day issues which arise can be decided and resolved at a local level, by the parents and staff who form the Executive. Briefly, the Executive Committee is responsible for upholding the ethos of the school, maintaining school grounds and buildings, ensuring that the BOM is formed in accordance with the Department of Education & Skills procedures and monitoring the working of the BOM and school policies.

The Executive meets once a month. Projects are undertaken by small committees and as always, the more people there are, the less work needs to be done by any one individual.

2.2. Board of Management (BOM)

The BOM is a democratically elected committee, consisting of eight members who serve for 4 years: the Principal, the Chairperson selected by the Executive, a member of teaching staff nominated by staff, 2 parent's representatives nominated by the PTA, 1 direct nominee of the Executive Committee and 2 independent representatives nominated and elected by the other 6 members.

2.3. Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

The PTA represents all of the parents and all of the teachers in the school.

"The parent teacher association is the structure through which parents and teachers in a school can work together for the best possible education for their children. The PTA works with the principal, staff and the board of management to build effective partnership between the home and school. Partnership between the home and school is important because with positive and active partnership the child gets the best that primary education can offer."

The PTA meetings take place in the school and are usually held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 8pm. All parents are invited to attend. It is a good way to get to meet some other parents and teachers and to find out some more about what's going on in the school. PTA news is also available on the school's website <http://www.letns.org/>

The role of the PTA is:

- The PTA offers a forum for discussion, suggestions and exchange of information for all adults in our school community. Good communication is essential for a healthy school atmosphere. The PTA is not a policy making or decision making group.
- Parents and teachers who attend the PTA AGM (Annual General Meeting) elect a committee to manage the PTA for a one year term. The committee includes a representative from the teaching staff, two from the BOM, one from the Executive Committee and two parent representatives. There is a chairperson, a secretary and a fundraiser.
- All members of our community are welcome to attend once-monthly meetings. At these meetings, a report is given from the Executive Committee, the Board of Management, the Ethos group and the

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teaching staff. The floor is then open to raise any issue of concern. Issues raised have included: traffic problems; grounds maintenance; healthy eating policy enforcement.

- If a parent is unable to attend a meeting, but wishes to raise an item, this may be done by contacting the classroom representative for their class or, if the classroom representative is not known, they can email the PTA directly at pta@letns.org

3. The Volunteer Program

Parents are invited to become involved in the school in many ways and at many levels. Each year as new parents join and other parents leave, lessons from previous years have to be passed along to the new committee. This section will explain what type of work exists for the parent volunteers in our school, what is expected from volunteers and approximate time and effort each of the roles will take.

3.1. Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

Any parent with a child in the school can be nominated to be on the PTA Committee. Commitment is for one year only. Please email pta@letns.org or give your name to Veronica in the school office (or come along to the September meeting!) if you would like to find out more. Please don't assume that someone else will volunteer for these roles. It would be a terrible loss for our children if the school had no PTA - remember that:

Parents Roles within PTA committee are as follows:

Role: Chairperson

Responsibilities:

- Attend the monthly PTA Meetings (usually lasting 1 hour but no more than 90 minutes)
- Prepare the Agenda for each meeting
- Chair the meeting
- Discuss and arrange for any guest speakers throughout the year (usually 2 per year)
- Point of contact for school/parents for any PTA related issue

Duration: One year

Role: Events Coordinator

Responsibilities:

- Ensure volunteers and logistics are in place for our fundraising events each year. Current events are (Halloween Disco (October), Feb event eg Pub Quiz), Easter Raffle (March/April), Walk In The Park (June)), though events may be varied or new events may be organised in any year.
- Be on site where required for the events or delegate another volunteer who understands these events to do so
- Be the point of contact for all volunteers/suppliers for each event

We have a file listing in detail what is needed to run each of these events. Fund-raising events may vary or other events may be added in any school year.

These events are vital to the school as the funds raised go directly towards improving facilities for our children. For example, the interactive whiteboards that are in each classroom were purchased with funds raised by the PTA. Our permanent basketball nets, other PE equipment, defibrillator, etc., all were purchased from funds raised by these events.

There are only a limited number of events in the year and they do not require a huge amount of administration work. Once the volunteers are in place, 'many hands make light work' and the coordinator(s) is/are needed just to oversee the running of the event on the day.

Duration: One year

'On site' time for actual event varies but for current events is approximately as follows: Halloween Disco (2 – 3 hours), Easter Raffle (2 hours), Walk in the Park (90 minutes – 2 hours).

Role: Representative on the National Parents Council Primary

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the nationwide organisation for parents of primary school children and is recognised by the Education Act 1998.

A county branch of NPC is a structure or network through which parents and parent associations in a county can work together for the best possible education for children.

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Membership of NPC brings many benefits:

- Access to information about education
- Support systems
- Training programmes
- A channel for views on education to influence policy at national level
- Opportunities to exchange views with other parents at local, regional and national levels
- Reduced insurance costs for parent association activities

Responsibilities:

To represent the school's parent association in matters pertaining to our membership of the National Parents Council Primary. The delegate on behalf of their association has the opportunity to:

- Exchange ideas and experiences about children's education
- Promote partnerships between children, teachers, parents and local communities
- Discuss educational issues of local, regional and national importance

Duration: One year

This would involve attending 2 or 3 NPC meetings per year as well as the NPC AGM. More information at <http://www.npc.ie>

3.2. Board of Management (BOM)

Under Department of Education & Skills rules, school Boards of Management must be replaced every four years at a time determined by the Department. There are two parent representatives on the Board of Management and these must be elected by the parents.

The Department of Education sets out the way to elect parent representatives. In essence, these are:

- The Executive Committee (the Patron of the school) calls the election
- Nominations are called for from the parents
- If there are more than two nominations, an election is held with a secret ballot
- There must be one female and one male parent representative.

Role: Parent representative on the BOM (two roles)

Responsibilities:

The Board is responsible for the day to day running of the school e.g., managing finances, recruiting staff, development of school policies & overseeing implementation of such policies, liaison with the Department of Education & Skills, NEPS, Túsła, NCSE, Educate Together, etc. as appropriate. Parent representatives participate as part of the overall Board in undertaking such management decisions and tasks as are appropriate to the Board generally. Parent representatives also act as a liaison and point of contact/information between the PTA and the Board though it should be noted that under Department rules there is no onus on parent nominees to take instruction from the PTA or parents generally on how to vote at BOM meetings or to report back to the PTA or parents on any matter other than those agreed by the Board overall.

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Duration: Four years

The Board of Management meet each month for approximately 2 hours. There is an on-going time-commitment and involvement between Board meetings for individual Board members to deal with Board matters, day-to-day school management issues, correspondence, accounts management and other meetings to attend as required.

3.3. Executive Committee

Role: Parent representative on the Executive Committee (up to 10 members)

Responsibilities:

- Upholding the ethos of the school,
- Maintaining school grounds and buildings,
- Appointing the Chairperson and the Executive Representative on the BOM
- Monitoring the working of the BOM and school policies

Duration: One year

Meetings are once a month for about 60 minutes.

Projects are done as committees.

3.4. Annual Events and Everyday Programmes

Events and Programmes at LETNS sometimes change depending on various factors, for example, fundraising for a specific, large project. To give parents an idea of the types of programmes and events we have run in the past, below is a list with a brief explanation of what each entailed. Details of how to organise regular or annual events can be obtained from the school.

Programme: Park Safe Programme

Overall the aim of the programme is to ensure the safety of children attending the school by (i) encouraging safe & responsible driving and parking in the vicinity of the school (ii) liaising with the local Gardai & county council on traffic management & parking issues (iv) encouraging the school community to respect the residents in the vicinity of the school in terms of driving and parking in the area.

Event: Winter Wonderland Event (every two years)

This is a show put together by teachers and students to showcase the wonderful talent of our students at LETNS. The PTA is mainly involved in sourcing raffle prizes for the event and helping with tickets at the door/directing parking, etc.

Event: Halloween Disco

This is a disco put together by the PTA as a fun event for the children. A DJ is organised, goodie bags are purchased and the parents volunteer to supervise the junior and senior discos.

Event: Easter Raffle

One of our annual events. Parents generously donate items for prizes – Easter eggs, hampers, items for hampers, etc and put them together for a raffle on the second last day before Easter Break.

Event: Walk in the Park

Each year our students do a sponsored walk in Willsbrook park. Parents volunteer to accompany the teachers and their students on the walk and usually organise some kind of treat for after they return to school.

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Event: Table Quiz Night

Parents, along with the PTA helped put together and support a fun Table Quiz Night to raise funds. These funds are used for various projects, for example, in 2017 we used the funds to help with the costs involved in replacing our astro turf

Event: Movie Nights/Evenings

These were introduced to help new parents and children get to know each other in a fun, relaxed setting. Initially they took place for junior classes but may be run for older classes in the future.

Other volunteering: Lost Property Reclaim Day, Library Clean Up, preparing books for class/main library, help in school garden etc.

Role: Ad hoc Volunteering

Parents may be asked to volunteer by class teachers for events such as:

Paired Reading: (Junior and Senior infants). This involves the parents listening to Junior and Senior infants practise their reading for maybe 5 or 10 minutes each. Time needed is as much time as parent has available – 30 minutes to an hour. This is usually done on any morning throughout the week, again dependent on parents' availability.

Baking Days: A class teacher might ask parents to help out with a baking day in class. It would involve helping children measure ingredients, supervising putting items in and taking them out of the ovens, decorating baked items, etc.

Art/Craft Projects: A teacher might ask for help with a special art project which would require extra hands to help out.

School Tours: Parents may be asked to accompany teachers and their class on school tours to provide extra help and supervision.

4. Communication – A Key to Success

The school is a learning community. This community is made up of pupils, staff, the various committees in the school (Board of Management, Executive Committee, PTA & Students Council), and the parents of the school. All of these have a strong interest in the school and are commonly known as stakeholders. The linkages and connections between all these partners must be clear and effective, if they are to work well together for the benefit of the children. Good relationships between the partners depend on good communication between them.

Mainly we communicate with volunteers generally via the PTA Newsletter and posters on the noticeboard and sometimes via the text-a-parent or general email from the school also. Once specific volunteers have offered their time to the coordinator the main form of communication is through email or text directly to them with regard to the specific event.

5. Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

Some of the steps in becoming a Volunteer in our school are as follows:

- All parents will be requested to complete a 'Volunteer' form at the beginning of each school year outlining their interest in participating as a volunteer. This information is gathered as part of the Pupil Information Form which is completed at the beginning of the school year.
- All forms are returned to the secretary's office and the school secretary maintains a database of volunteer contact and identification information (as part of the pupil information record).
- This database can be used to identify parents with specific skills to assist with school activities, events, etc.
- Every parent wishing to participate will be requested to sign in at the front reception and to wear an identification badge at all times when doing volunteer work in our school.
- The school secretary and the BOM secretary will maintain a database of volunteer contact and identification information.
- **NB:** All parents wishing to become volunteers at the school must complete the online Garda Vetting Online Form through Educate Together, stating what type of volunteering they intend to do (events, classroom assistance, etc). The process takes about 2 and a half weeks and forms for initiating the online process are available from the school office.

6. Rights and responsibilities

6.1. Volunteers Rights

- To know if, and how, they are being selected
- To be given meaningful work to do
- To know what is expected from them
- To be offered appropriate training
- To be thanked and to have their voluntary contribution recognised
- To receive supervision and support
- To get something out of the work for themselves
- To know who to go to if there is a problem
- To be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred when volunteering
- To make mistakes and learn from them
- To be made aware of any disciplinary procedures
- To be treated fairly and not to experience discrimination
- To have safe working conditions, including insurance cover
- To be informed about, and given the opportunity to play an active part in the organisation as a whole
- To be able to say 'no' and to leave without feeling guilty

6.2. Volunteers Responsibilities

- To respect the values and aims of the organisation
- To be committed
- To be reliable and give the organisation sufficient warning if unable to turn up
- To be punctual
- To attend essential training and support sessions
- To undertake the work to a high standard
- To be honest if there are problems
- To respect confidentiality
- To leave when asked and/or when no longer enjoying the volunteering experience

7. Tips for Volunteering

- ***Confidentiality is very important.***

Like teachers, volunteers are bound by a code of ethics to keep confidential matters within the school.

As you work with the children and teachers, information of a private or confidential nature may become known to you. The abilities, problems, relationships and confidences of staff, students and their parents should only be discussed with the school administration or the student's teacher. If a child confides in you about a personal problem or family matter, this should be made known to the class teacher or Principal and volunteers should not actively engage in dealing with a problem highlighted by a child ***Being confidential is very important!***

- Take your lead from the teachers and dress appropriately for the job you are doing. If you are assisting with an art project you will be more appropriately dressed if you are in comfortable clothes that can easily be washed. Casual clothes are often the most appropriate clothes to wear in a classroom setting as they allow you the freedom of movement necessary for more active lessons.
- When dealing with children parents should always follow the work and guidelines set out by the relevant teacher and should advise the teacher of any issues arising.

8. Rewards of Volunteering

We know you will enjoy the time you spend volunteering in many ways in our school. By sharing your time and helping in any volunteering activity you are contributing to the school environment and benefitting all the children at your child's school. You are also using your skills and talents, as well as gaining new skills that can help you in future endeavours. As you volunteer in our school you will gain an insight into how the school functions, and the environment in which your child is taught each day.

As a volunteer, you are a representative of the school and through your volunteer experience you will be able to share with parents and the community the many positive things that children and staff are doing.

We want to thank you for the gift of your time. The staff and the children and the whole school community will benefit from your contribution.

Last but not least, some scientific evidence about benefits of volunteering:

Studies on altruism have shown that people who volunteer experience benefits such as:

- enhanced meaning and purpose
- a more active lifestyle
- positive emotions, such as kindness, in place of harmful, negative emotional states

Some studies even suggest that altruistic behavior may suppress disease activity and activate the body's immune response.

That sounds like an all-around win-win—so what are you waiting for?

Mary Tuohy

Principal

Tina Stallard

Chairperson B.O.M.

Date: 22nd November 2017

Next Review November 2019