

CORK DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL:

OUR VISION

Inspired by Summerhill School, Sudbury School, Bullerbyn Unschooling Group, and many other alternative education initiatives in several countries, we decided to establish **a democratic school in Cork.**

‘A democratic school’ may mean different things to different people. To avoid misunderstanding, we spell out our vision below.

We want to establish a SCHOOL. We want to give our students an opportunity to learn science, arts, crafts, and technology – all the best humanity has to offer. To this end, we will endeavour to work with best teachers, mentors, scientists, artists, craftsmen and other skilled people who can open the world of learning to our students. We will strive to create exciting learning opportunities, which go well beyond traditional lessons confined to a school building. Inevitably, this will involve a degree of experimentation. In this, we will be guided by feedback from our students.

Establishing a school also means that we will help our students prepare well for any formal, external exams (Junior Cert, Leaving Cert, etc) that they may wish to take — *if they freely choose to take them.*

We want to establish a school that gives FREEDOM. We believe that true learning happens naturally when people are given security, freedom and opportunity. Fear and compulsion are its greatest enemies. Consequently, we will give our students unfettered choice – within the boundaries of the law – of how they spend their time at school. There will be *no compulsory lessons*. There will be *no obligation to take any exams*. There will be no pressure to ‘learn’.

“But what if your children choose to do nothing, and learn nothing?” – some critics may ask. We don’t share those fears. Sure, we anticipate that our students may spend a lot of time doing things that may look like “doing nothing much” in the eyes of some adults: playing, pursuing their hobbies, reading books of their own choice, or simply daydreaming or mucking about with friends. Yet we believe these to be the most valuable learning times — more important than formal learning (and we will offer ample opportunities for the latter, too).

We want to establish a school that is DEMOCRATIC. We want “freedom, not license” (A. S. Neill). There will be laws, rules, regulations and obligations, and punishments for transgressors. However – unlike in traditional schools – these will be decided democratically, through discussion and voting, by whole school meetings, where *everyone – from the youngest pupil to the principal – will have equal voice, and equal vote*. Also, our rules and obligations will be flexible; we expect them to be modified frequently by school meetings, in line with our experiences and changing needs.

We want to establish a school where ALL CHILDREN CAN THRIVE. Naturally this means *freedom from all forms of abuse, such as bullying*. It also means *cherishing diversity*: sexual, intellectual, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic — and treating that diversity as human capital to draw from. We will welcome children with special educational needs, as long as we are confident that they can benefit from our model (this we will discuss and decide on a case-by-case basis).

There are certain VALUES that are dear to us. *Solidarity* is one. We want our students to be mindful of others, and help each other. We are not against competitiveness — an impulse probably inherent in all of us — but we will discourage rat race.

We want our students to develop a *stable sense of self-worth* that is not built chiefly on social comparisons (concerning looks, wealth, academic achievement or other such extrinsic goods), but rather on good experiences and worthy deeds.

Naturally we want our students to be *successful*, which – following A . S. Neill — we define as the “ability to work joyfully and live positively”.

We want our students to grow *capable of love and work* – the two key attributes of mental health and maturity (E. Erickson).

We would like our students to be *resilient* and have strong *self-regulation* skills. We want them to have clarity of purpose, courage and determination to go for things they truly love – irrespective of what others think. We believe that democratic education offers ideal opportunities for developing such qualities.

Above all, we want our students to be *happy*. “I would rather Summerhill produce a happy street sweeper than a neurotic prime minister” – A . S. Neill said about his own school. We second that.

These are the values which we will share with our students – though it is up to them to choose or to reject them. For “The function of the child is to live his own life, not

the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows best” (A. S. Neill).

We want our School to become FINANCIALLY SECURE in the long run. Profit is not our main motive. Our main drive is to give our own children – and children of others – an opportunity to thrive. Still, we would like our school to bring in enough funds to make the whole enterprise viable, to generate some income for those who made effort to establish it, and to offer fair pay for those who work in it.

We want to learn from others — and want others to learn from us. We will network with people, groups, organisations and initiatives that share similar values and goals. We will acknowledge their contribution to our project – and share our ideas and experiences freely with those who wish to establish similar initiatives elsewhere. We will collaborate with EUDEC (European Democratic Education Community) network [www.eudec.com]. *Our ultimate goal is to make democratic education mainstream — and only sharing and collaboration will make that possible.*

As of today, we are at the beginning of the road. There are many dilemmas to resolve. What legal structure will suit our school best? What role should students play in hiring and firing of staff? How about fees and bursaries for less well-off? — these are just some of the questions we don’t know the answers to — yet. We shall work together to find them.

We invite everyone who shares this vision and wants to turn it into reality to join us.

Cork, February 2018

Our Facebook Group: [Cork Democratic School \(In Progress\)](#)