

## SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

### REPORT 2001

#### MEMBERSHIP

##### *Church of Ireland*

Rt Rev WP Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (Chairman June 2000)  
 Rev Canon RJEFB Black  
 Mrs JM Bruton  
 Rev MC Classon  
 Rev Canon JAA Condell  
 Rev J Merrick  
 Miss S Parkes  
 Professor TT West (appointed June 2000)

##### *Presbyterian Church*

Mr B Duffy  
 Rev CM Hunter

##### *Methodist Church*

Rev DAL Cooney  
 Dr JW Harris

##### *Religious Society of Friends*

Mr W Allen (obit January 2001)  
 Mr RH Johnson (from February 2001)  
 Professor B Murdoch (Vice-Chairman)

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Secondary Education Committee (SEC) is a body comprising representatives from the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Religious Society of Friends.

It draws its authority from a resolution passed by the sponsoring churches in 1965.

The principal functions of the SEC are twofold. Firstly, to distribute a Block Grant provided by the Department of Education and Science (DE&S) to families, where at least one parent is a member of a reformed church and who need assistance to send their children to protestant secondary schools. It also seeks to represent the interest of the member churches in the post-primary education system.

## MEMBERSHIP

The death of Mr W Allen drew to a close the valued contribution of one who had served on the Committee since 1977. Mr Allen had always represented the views, insights and values of the Religious Society of Friends in an effective and compassionate manner. He was concerned for the children and parents who were linked to our schools and sought to give them the greatest support possible. We thank God for his example and commitment.

Bishop Edward Darling retired from the Committee in May 2000. He had served on the Committee since 1988 and as Chairman since 1990. His service had been of inestimable value as he had steered the Committee through a period of considerable change. Bishop Paul Colton was subsequently elected as Chairman and a vacancy on the Committee filled by Professor TT West.

## BLOCK GRANT SCHEME

The Government Block Grant Scheme for protestant schools continues to assist parents to send their children to the following schools in the Republic of Ireland:

Alexandra College, Dublin	Bandon Grammar School
Drogheda Grammar School	Dundalk Grammar School
The High School, Dublin	Kilkenny College, Kilkenny
The King's Hospital, Dublin	Midleton College, Cork
Monaghan Collegiate School	Newtown School, Waterford
Rathdown School, Dublin	The Royal School Cavan
St Andrew's College, Dublin	St Columba's College, Dublin
St Patrick's Grammar School, Dublin	Sandford Park School, Dublin
Sligo Grammar School	Sutton Park School, Dublin
Villier's School, Limerick	Wesley College, Dublin
Wilson's Hospital School, Multyfarnham	

Assistance with boarding costs is available to pupils who attend:

Ashton Comprehensive School, Cork	Royal & Prior Comprehensive School, Raphoe
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The three other comprehensive schools under protestant management are:

East Glendalough School, Wicklow	Mount Temple School, Dublin 3
Newpark School, Blackrock, Co Dublin	

In the school year 1999/2000 the audited accounts show the total amount received from the Department of Education and Science (DE&S) was £3,303,573 (previous year £3,052,596). Grants in aid of fees totalled £2,722,654 and capitation grants to schools totalled £260,104. The cost of administering the scheme amounted to £67,702 and was partly defrayed by an administrative grant from the Department.

The numbers of pupils assisted with grants were as follows:

Day Grants 1565 (previous year 1703); Boarding Grants 1318 (1376); Total 2883 (3079).

The Committee has continued the process of simplifying the assessment criteria and the grant application forms. The supporting documentation is now based on the applicant's Tax Assessment as agreed by the Revenue. When an applicant's income is below the tax threshold then the assessment is based on Social Welfare certification.

The close liaison between the SEC Administrator and the various protestant charities continues with regular meetings convened by Protestant Aid.

The Administrator, Mr Richard Kilroy, has recently visited all the protestant schools to explain the changes to the application form and assessment criteria. Mr Kilroy has also attended a number of meetings hosted by various bodies to explain the workings of the grant scheme and is always happy to do so.

The Committee wishes to record its appreciation of the contribution of Mr Kilroy and his assistant Mrs McAuley to the efficient administration and development of the scheme.

#### **EURO CHANGEOVER**

Planning for the Euro changeover is in hand and while this will occur during a grant year steps are being taken to minimise the effect on school administrations. The second and third moiety of grants in 2001/2002 will be paid to schools in the new currency.

#### **COMPANY FORMATION**

The formation of a limited company, by the Committee's Solicitors, has commenced following the agreement of the four Church Bodies in 2000. It is intended to initiate the company at the beginning of the Committee's financial year 1 August 2001. The formation of the company simply provides additional protection for the Committee and its work.

#### **THE EDUCATION ACT, 1998**

In accordance with section 1 (3) the Act is now fully in operation. The DE&S is holding consultations on the implementation of various procedures. However patrons and boards of governors should, as a matter of course, carefully consult the Act in regard to proposed decisions.

The Committee on Management, on which the SEC is represented, has had preliminary discussions with department officials regarding the formation of boards of management. Such boards are a requirement of the Act. There is a commitment by the voluntary protestant schools to partnership in management while maintaining the traditions and wealth of knowledge and expertise given by existing governors or directors. Each school has been urged to explore how a board of management might operate in accordance with the Act and the school's founding documents. Schools have also looked carefully at the role of the patron and considered what body or individual should be defined as patron for the particular school. A number of schools have made considerable progress in these explorations. All schools are anxious to maintain the high level of management expertise shown by governors or directors and by principals in any new development.

The Committee, together with other bodies, was represented by the Secretary at discussions on section 29 of the Act. This provides for appeals by parents to the DE&S where a school declines to enrol a pupil, or where a pupil is suspended for a certain period of time or is expelled. The procedures point to the need for all schools to have appropriate internal review mechanisms which stand up to public scrutiny.

#### **THE EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT, 2000**

The Act will have considerable importance for all in education but it will be extremely difficult for schools to comply with all the legal requirements unless there has been additional funding to provide the necessary resources. The intention to appoint education welfare officers has yet to be put in place and there has been no indication by the DE&S of the possible number of appointees.

#### **JUNIOR CERTIFICATE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION EXAMINATION**

A number of schools are now offering this course and in-service training has been provided for teachers. The conference for religious education teachers in protestant schools has had to be postponed due to the loss of teaching days in the schools' calendar for the current year.

#### **INDUSTRIAL ACTION**

It is reasonable and just that teachers should be appropriately remunerated for their significant contribution to the development of children. However it has been a matter of grave anxiety to this Committee, to management and parents that industrial action should have been maintained for so long and should have caused such upset to pupils. It is inappropriate that pupils should ever be unwitting hostages in industrial disputes particularly at a time when some pupils are already unsettled and even disturbed by the necessary pressures of the examinations.

#### **COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS**

The Committee has noted a proposed restructuring of boards of management in comprehensive schools and the need to tailor such patterns to the different needs of particular schools. The commitment by the DE&S to providing greatly improved buildings for those schools where the buildings were decaying is to be welcomed.