

Secondary Education Committee – Report 2003

SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REPORT 2003

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

Rt Rev WP Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (Chairman)
Rev Canon RJEFB Black
Mrs JM Bruton
Rev MC Classon
Rev Canon JAA Condell
Rev Canon J Merrick
Ms EE Oldham

Presbyterian Church

Mr B Duffy (Vice-Chairman)
Rev CM Hunter

Methodist Church

Rev V Wyse Jackson
Dr JW Harris

Religious Society of Friends

Mr R Johnson
Professor B Murdoch

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 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.

The Committee operates as a limited company thus allowing both the corporate body and the liability of individual members to be appropriately insured.

MEMBERSHIP

The Rev V Wyse Jackson, honorary secretary to the Methodist Board of Education, was appointed as a representative of the Methodist Church in place of Rev DA Levistone Cooney. Mr Cooney had given valuable service to the Committee serving on the Finance Sub-committee and had taken a particular interest in the needs of children from rural areas. Dr JW Harris has been appointed in his place to the Finance Sub-Committee.

Mr R Kilroy who has served as administrator to the scheme for over five years will retire from that role in July. His understanding of the concerns of schools and his interest and compassion for applicants has been greatly appreciated. During his tenure of office the grant assessment developed in parallel with the changes in the taxation system. This has ensured that applicants are all treated fairly and that the Block grant is administered as equitably as possible. Mr Kilroy will continue his links with schools through his interest in the Gap Year Project. This provides a variety of employment experiences for those who postpone college entrance by a year.

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 currently available to pupils who attend:

Royal & Prior Comprehensive School, Raphoe.

The four other comprehensive schools under protestant management are:

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

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In the event of a family living more than fifteen miles from the school and where there is no other suitable school nearer to hand, a child who is not living at home may qualify for a boarding out grant.

In the school year 2001/2002 the audited accounts show the total amount received from the Department of Education and Science (DE&S) was €4,693,574 (previous year €4,443,114). Grants in aid of fees totalled €4,272,465 and capitation grants to schools totalled €339,254. The cost of administering the scheme amounted to €117,517 and was partly defrayed by an administrative grant from the Department.

The rate of the Block Grant in common with other educational payments by the DE&S will remain static this year as a result of the Government's budgetary adjustments. Because of inflation this is an effective cut in real terms. As the Committee has maintained a reserve for such an eventuality it is possible to alleviate this by a small increase in the level of grant. In most schools parents will still find a widening gap between the grant and the total fee to be paid. Schools have had to raise fees because of the extraordinary rise in insurance and the general increase in the cost of services.

The number of pupils assisted with grants was as follows:

Day Grants	1365 (previous year 1377)
Boarding Grants	1098 (previous year 1163)
Total	2463 (previous year 2540).

The level of maximum grant for the school year 2001/2002 was £3,809 (Boarding) £1,524 (Day).

The overall enrolment in the voluntary schools in 01 / 02 totalled 9169 of whom 2607 were boarders. The Committee circulated information leaflets to national schools, independent junior schools and clergy. The Administrator, Mr Kilroy, has attended a number of meetings to speak about the scheme. This has resulted in an encouraging interest in the grant scheme. There is still concern that some families are not made aware of the scheme and of the supports available from other sources.

The Administrator annually visits all the protestant voluntary secondary schools to explain the assessment criteria and to discuss issues of concern on behalf of the Committee.

The clarity of the grant application procedure together with the standardisation of the documentation required has resulted in a speedy assessment process leading to a prompt response to applicants. There are procedures in place to provide for situations where there is a sudden and significant change in family circumstances through bereavement or unemployment. Such situations should be brought to the attention of the administrator. It is also possible for applicants to have a decision reviewed.

EDUCATIONAL LEGISLATION

A handbook containing templates for enrolment policies and codes of behaviour has been prepared and circulated by the Committee on Management. A template first requires a school to consider and define its ethos as the foundational document and to construct all subsequent policies in relation to that. It would be ill advised for any school merely to adapt a policy created for another situation. There has been a judicious decision by all partner groups to decline the production of draft guidelines and rather to offer templates to assist schools in the construction of a school plan.

The tardiness of the Government in providing adequate staffing resources for the National Educational Welfare Board has resulted in schools being expected to comply with complex legislation but without the necessary guidance from the Board.

There has been a welcome increase in the number of schools taking practical steps to introduce boards of management or management structures in line with the Education Act, 1998.

CURRICULAR ISSUES

The Religious Education Support Service, in co-operation with the Logos web site, has provided all schools with a CD-ROM that introduces aspects of Christianity and gives details of individual denominations with video and audio clips. This is a valuable and welcome resource.

The Committee has noted that the Religious Education curriculum for the Leaving Certificate is currently awaiting ministerial approval. It is to be hoped that the Minister's approval will not be delayed pending the review being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) regarding the development of senior cycle education. This review is a very welcome development as the Leaving Certificate (established) will be considered in terms of overall process of teaching methods, learning styles and assessment. The Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme may be considered for inclusion as part of a unitised Senior Cycle programme. The Transition Year as the initial year of Senior Cycle has to be considered in terms of its foundational role for any revised curriculum and certification structure. All partners including parents and students are invited by NCCA to take part in the review process.

CHAPLAINCY

The possibility that a pilot scheme to fund the salaries of chaplains in voluntary secondary schools would be put in place has yet to come to fruition. However, there has been general support for such a pilot scheme from all partners and it is to be hoped that this will go ahead in the next school year.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The ongoing difficulties regarding the payment of staff for supervision and substitution are greatly regretted. Heretofore this work had been done on a purely voluntary basis and the offer of payment and the subsequent agreement that such a payment would be counted as pensionable appeared very welcome. The emergence of supervisors as a separate category of employee is to be deplored as the interaction of teacher and student outside class has been an important part of the life of a school community. Teachers gained many insights into the concerns and interests of students who, in turn, developed a greater respect for the teacher as a person rather than a mere purveyor of education.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS

There have been no further developments in regard to the formal expansion of boards of management. A number of the schools have found that the buildings erected at the beginning of the seventies are deteriorating and have been pressing for replacement. As the DE&S is reviewing the building programme it is not possible to ascertain when these necessary building projects will come on stream.