

Secondary Education Committee – Report 2005

**SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**REPORT 2005**

**MEMBERSHIP**

***Church of Ireland***

The Rt Rev WP Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (Chairman)  
The Rev Canon RJEFB Black  
Mrs JM Bruton  
Mrs L Clarke  
Mr G Jephson  
Rev Canon J Merrick  
Mrs P O'Malley  
Ms EE Oldham

***The Presbyterian Church***

Mr B Duffy (Vice-Chairman to March 2005)  
Rev CM Hunter

***The Methodist Church***

Rev N Fallows (From September 2004)  
Dr JW Harris  
Rev V Wyse Jackson (until June 2004)

***The 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 in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Religious Society of Friends.

The Committee derives 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. Secondly it also seeks to represent the interest of the member churches in the post-primary education system.

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

### **PERSONALIA**

The Rev Vanessa Wyse-Jackson who had given much appreciated service as a member of the Committee had resigned on ceasing to be the Secretary to the Methodist Board of Education and the Committee welcomed her successor The Rev Noel Fallows.

The Committee records its appreciation of the commitment and service to parents and schools of the Administrator Mr David Wynne and his assistant Mrs Bridie McCauley.

Mr Brian Duffy has completed his term as vice-chairman and the appointee for the next three years is Dr JW Harris.

### **BLOCK GRANT SCHEME**

Enrolments in the twenty-one fee charging schools totalled 9250 (9172 in previous year). This figure does not include the five comprehensive schools. In the school year 2003/04 the audited accounts showed the totals received from the Department of Education & Science was €5,120,481 (€4,917,619) the grant in aid of fees totalled €4,736,574 (€4,573,929) and capitation adjustment grant €51,907 (€43,434). The cost of administering the SEC scheme was €26,709 (€19,554). There is a small grant to assist the running of the office but it is necessary to utilise interest from the grant received to provide a further subvention for these costs.

The following numbers of grants were awarded in respect of the 2004-05 school year: 1493 day grants (1,373), 1091 boarding grants (1,068), 2584 in total (2,441).

The Committee agreed to increase grants for the school year 2005/06 on a scale from boarding €1,140 - €1,500 (€1,140 - €1,050) day €480 - €1,710 (€480 - €1,620). An increase in certain allowances was also agreed in relation to the reckoning of assessments. This resulted in improved access to grants for a number of families.

The Administrator, Mr Wynne, again attended a number of open days at the request of schools and took the opportunity to discuss issues with individual parents. He also made contact with each school to discuss the functioning of the grant scheme. This ensures that schools have every opportunity to draw attention to the difficulties of any individual family.

In recent years there has been a delay in the payment, each term, of the block grant by the Department of Education & Science. It is understood that this results from the delay in payments to the Department itself from the Department of Finance. There is an inevitable knock-on effect with payments not being made to schools until the very end of term. This delay is regretted.

#### **CAPITATION ADJUSTMENT GRANT**

This grant has been paid directly to schools for disbursement according to the school's discretion to support those families who are necessitous. The Committee resolved that the grant in future would be paid directly to schools based on the proportion of grant in aid of fees being paid to schools in a particular year and that the schools should continue to disperse the grant to aid those families who come within the ambit of the SEC grant scheme.

#### **STANDARDISED SCHOOL YEAR**

The development of a standardised school year with a calendar of holiday breaks set out for the next five years has had an impact on those schools which provide a six day teaching week. These are boarding schools whose enrolments include a number of pupils from families currently located overseas. The holiday breaks particularly at Christmas hold significant difficulties for travel and the Committee regrets that Minister Dempsey did not find it possible to grant a derogation to the small number of schools involved to adjust their holiday breaks.

#### **SCHOOL BUILDING**

The former Minister for Education & Science Mr Noel Dempsey TD had in 2003 and 2004 issued a school building programme which indicated the status of building applications in respect of each school. This was a useful programme in that schools could anticipate the likely date when such building application would move to actual construction. The current Minister Ms Mary Hanafin TD has moved away from this transparent programme to issuing a piecemeal indication of progress. She has felt it helpful to indicate those schools progressing to construction at the beginning of 2005 and indicated that subsequent announcements will follow as projects complete. It is noted that no schools in the sector have been given permission to progress applications for extension or replacement. The deteriorating condition of a number of comprehensive and voluntary secondary schools has been adverted to in previous reports. Regrettably there has been no significant progress in relation to these very necessary projects and pupils and staff are working in inadequate conditions and this is affecting the delivery of education. Voluntary secondary schools have, in some cases of necessity, had to increase fees because of the urgent need to upgrade buildings.

#### **BURSARS' CONFERENCE**

The Administrator arranged a conference for bursars in second level schools and this was a useful exercise updating bursars in relation to the grant scheme, providing bursars with the opportunity to exchange expertise and providing an introduction to an accounting package which might be of assistance to schools.

#### **SCHOOL CHAPLAINS**

The estimates for the Department of Education & Science for the Year 2005 did not allow for any funding for the proposed pilot scheme for school chaplains in voluntary

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secondary schools. A number of schools continue to fund the provision of a chaplain from within school resources. The work of chaplains is extremely valuable not only in the religious education area but in the pastoral care of pupils and staff. It is understood that a position paper on chaplaincy is also being prepared in relation to the community and comprehensive sector by the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools. This paper will provide additional insights into the role of chaplain and will give rise to some discussion when it is circulated.

### **BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT**

The Committee noted a report of a meeting of the Secretary with the ASTI in relation to the progress of boards of management in second level schools. This meeting clarified a number of issues for the ASTI and the reiteration of the understanding of the ethos of schools in the sector was appreciated. There had been no significant response to a proposal to holding a seminar on the structure of boards of management but schools could utilise the services of a trained facilitator.

### **WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION**

The revision of the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) procedure was noted by the Committee and together with the Church of Ireland Board of Education a response to proposed changes was made. The DE&S was pressed to respond promptly those shortcomings in the areas of resource and staffing identified during the procedure. The Committee expressed considerable concern that the evaluation process would be undermined by the publication of WSE reports as a result of a judgement in the courts. It was likely that the publication of such reports would threaten the openness by which the participants would approach evaluation in any school.