



Statement in Relation to School Admissions Proposals.

The General Synod Board of Education RI was interested to learn of the remarks made by Minister Richard Bruton today in relation to on-going considerations regarding school admissions.

In making his remarks, the Minister reiterated that he is mindful of how any proposed changes on school admissions would impact on the “important position of religious minority schools”. The Board is grateful to the Minister for highlighting the role and place of minority schools within the Irish education system and Irish society.

Church of Ireland and Protestant primary and secondary schools are embedded in communities across Ireland as local schools and serve a wide variety of students, at primary and second level, from various faith traditions and family backgrounds and have done so for generations. They have long been respected for their lived commitment to pluralism and diversity. The ability of religious minority schools to continue the key role they play in educational provision in modern Irish society is vitally important to safeguard. It is an expression of active participation by minority religious groups in modern Irish society as conscionable minorities who are concerned with contributing to the civic common good of diversity of experience for children, leading to a respectful and engaging citizenship without discrimination, in service to the common good. However, more than this, Church of Ireland and Protestant schools at primary and second level exist to serve their students who are entitled to receive their primary and second level education within an ethos that is conducive to their own beliefs and that of their parents/guardians/family. The Board is strongly of the view that considerations around changes to school admissions must reflect this existing practical reality.

The Board welcomes the invitation by Minister Bruton to engage in consultations on the complex area of school admissions and will do so. The Board finds it deeply disturbing nonetheless that special interest lobby groups, who ostensibly seek equality, would publically reject and oppose such consultations. The Board wishes to highlight that the views of the 15,000 pupils at our primary schools and the 10,000 students at Church of Ireland/Protestant second level schools and their parents along with the staff, Boards of Management/Governing Bodies and patrons of each of the two hundred and twenty seven schools under Church of Ireland/Protestant patronage in the State, are entitled to be heard.

The Board looks forward to reiterating at those consultations the importance of the ability to prioritise entry for students from Church of Ireland, Protestant and other minority religious traditions into the relatively small number of religious minority schools that exist in the State.

Four “options” have been suggested by Minister Bruton in relation to school admissions. The Board will give close consideration to these “options” with specific consideration to how they would affect both primary and second level Church of Ireland/Protestant schools. However, each school will have their own view on what is appropriate for them in their individual contexts.

The Board is also conscious that the Admissions to School Bill 2016 is currently being considered by the Oireachtas and will, no doubt, add an extra dimension to the consultations that will take place with the Minister for Education and Skills and Departmental Officials. The Board also wishes to highlight that while the Minister has put forward four “options” the Board might have other approaches which it may consider appropriate to minority faith schools.

We look forward to engaging with the Minister and his Officials on these matters and we thank him for his highlighting of how changes to the ecology of existing school admissions would impact minority religious schools.

Ends.