

General Synod 2022

Board of Education Report

Proposer: Canon Malcolm Kingston

Check Against Delivery · Embargo Until Delivery

I am pleased to propose the adoption of the Report of the Board of Education by the General Synod and in making this proposal will highlight the activities of the Board of Education for Northern Ireland during the past year. In seconding this report my colleague from the Board of Education for the Republic of Ireland will summarise the work of the Board in their area of jurisdiction.

The Board of Education in Northern Ireland continues to work with other churches to ensure that education is shaped by the core values of the Christian faith at a time when these are under increasing societal scrutiny. The Board also contributes parish projects working with local schools and will be opening the opportunity to access this fund after Synod before the end of June. The Board further funds the Church of Ireland Lecture at Queens University through the HUB Chaplaincy Centre. This year's lecture is available on the HUB website: www.thehubbelfast.org/

Schools in Northern Ireland have continued to work in the past year in the context of the continuing Covid 19 pandemic with its effects on society in general and on schools. The Board has recognised the professionalism and dedication of all involved in schools and would wish to place on record its thanks to Governors, school leaders, teachers, ancillary staff and parents for the support that they have given to children and young people during this time where schools have faced unprecedented challenges.

The Church of Ireland is represented on the Board of the Education Authority by Reverend Amanda Adams and Ms Frances Boyd. The Education Authority is responsible for the delivery of education and youth services and since its inception has been responsible for supporting the raising of standards to ensure that each individual learner can reach his or her potential. A major area of pressure in the Northern Ireland education system continues to be the provision of appropriate education for children and young people with Special Educational Needs. The Education Authority continues to oversee a major review of Special Needs provision, a review which has resulted in significant improvements in the past two years. This work continues and will include the imminent publication of specific area planning proposals for provision which aims to ensure that all children and young people with Special Educational Needs have access to provision which meets those needs and enables each to achieve their potential.

Church representation on the Education Authority also provides a particularly important input to decision making in the context of the Transferors' right to appoint Governors to Controlled schools. Over 1,500 Governors are appointed to individual school Boards and play a pivotal role in the

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governance of these schools and provide an opportunity for the maintenance of a strong Christian ethos. The scheduled re-constitution of Boards of Governors has been postponed until 2023, due to the impact of Covid 19. The Board of Education NI would wish to encourage Parishes to make all efforts to ensure that all Transferor seats are filled in this process. Boards of Governors are playing an increasing role in the oversight of education provision and have a vital role to play in the running of schools. It is essential that the church uses the opportunity to have individuals at the hub of school decision making and accountability.

The Board extends its thanks to Ms Adams and Mrs Boyd for the many hours of dedicated service they give representing the Church on the Education Authority Board. The importance of this representation which has a direct influence on education, the furtherance of statutory rights and the missional role of the church is acknowledged.

The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) which is made up of representatives of the three main Protestant churches in Northern Ireland continues to have a strategic role in education in Northern Ireland as it engages with the Department of Education and other educational bodies. Representatives from TRC are involved at strategic and operational levels in the Area Planning process which aims to ensure that the provision of school places in Northern Ireland and the configuration of schools provide the opportunity for all children and young people to have equitable access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework pathways at post 14 and post 16 phases of their educational journey and to educational resources. This is particularly sensitive work involving the development of proposals on existing and future school provision that are often very sensitive at local community as well as at macro and micro political levels. The Education Authority carries the legislative duty to publish strategic and operational Area Plans having worked with all education bodies in the construction of the plan. Members of the Board of Education NI have been actively involved in the multi-organisation work to devise a strategic plan and an operational plan which will contain specific proposals for the review and development of schools across the province. Consultation on the next strategic Area Plan has recently been completed and the Operational Plan for both mainstream and special schools will shortly be published for consultation.

This is an important aspect of the development of education in Northern Ireland and Parishes are encouraged to consider the Area Planning proposals carefully and actively respond as appropriate as this sets out the framework for school provision in future years. While there may be challenging local proposals which emerge for consultation in respect to individual schools the Board requests that Parishes pray that the needs of the children and young people be the central consideration in decisions about school provision and that Governors seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their decision making.

The Church of Ireland continues to be represented by Dr Peter Hamill on the Board of the Controlled Schools Support Council. CSSC is a young organisation which was set up to advocate for Controlled

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schools. The development of this body has been widely welcomed amongst Controlled schools with the vast majority having become members. In addition to the ongoing support that its officers provide to schools CSSC has increasingly commissioned and conducted important research into various aspects of Controlled education. A particularly impressive aspect of their work has been on the Christian ethos which is at the core of Controlled schools.

In addition to its involvement with the formal education sector, the Board of Education has welcomed the formation of the Board of Ministry with Children and Families and is delighted that Dr Hamill is the Secretary to this new Board.

The Board also notes the establishment, as part of the New Decade New Approach Agreement, of an Independent Body to Review Education in Northern Ireland and is particularly pleased that a member of this Board has been appointed to this panel by the Minister of Education.

In summary the ongoing provision of education in Northern Ireland continues to present many challenges and opportunities. It remains vitally important that the roles of churches are not diminished, and this Board of Education is committed to making a meaningful contribution on behalf of our church and to the maintenance of a strong Christian ethos in schools.