

GENERAL SYNOD 2011

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Seconded by the Right Revd Ken Good, Bishop of Derry & Raphoe

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace,

I wish to highlight in this Secunder's speech just three brief points, leaving some other key issues in the Report to be dealt with in the education Motion which will follow.

1 COMMITMENT OF SCHOOL GOVERNORS

I begin by thanking all who serve our church on school Boards of Governors and on Education and Library Boards – we express our sincere appreciation of this vital voluntary work taking place in hundreds of schools in NI and across five Area Boards. The commitment and service of Church of Ireland transferors, along with other church transferors, is a crucial point of contact between the Church and society where people of faith can make a real and positive difference.

2. CHURCHES' ROLE IN ELBs AN IN ESA

In our interaction in public life, Christians are required to be positive people, with a problem-solving approach in working with others – this is all part of being salt and light in the world. When the churches faced a threat to their historical rights to be nominated to Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland, they defended their rights but sought to do so constructively by suggesting a way in which the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) could be established using a model which would ensure the churches' involvement in education could be continued as of right. We are pleased to notice support for this idea in the manifestos of some political parties and this is encouraging. Now that the new Assembly is about to be up and running, we ask the parties to reconsider this proposal and to engage with stakeholders to develop these ideas.

3. THE FUTURE OF STRANMILLIS COLLEGE

I also wish to mention one other area of education in the report where the churches are trying to present a clear and shared vision. It is section 5 of our Report to Synod- the proposal to merge Stranmillis College with QUB.

The transferor churches have a long standing connection with Stranmillis and could have adopted a defensive approach to preserve the *status quo*. However the *status quo* is no longer sustainable. Having carefully considered the proposals, the Boards of Education of the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches feel that with appropriate safeguards for ethos, the merger option presented the most constructive way forward.

Transferors have spent a lot of time with representatives of Queens University Belfast and with the Department of Employment and Learning, explaining the nature of the ethos of Controlled schools. These schools are not secular schools but are church-related with a distinctly Christian ethos. In the Stranmillis of the future, we believe this faith characteristic of such schools must be protected and enhanced. It is vital that teachers preparing for work in this unique sector receive training in the history, values and ethos of such schools and in particular how best to teach religious education in this context.

One of the proposals is to include the Transferor churches in a Stakeholder Forum in the new merged institution, which will have an advisory and consultative role in its governance. We welcome this opportunity to have a voice for the Christian churches in a place where teachers are prepared for working in controlled schools. It restores a right snatched away a few years ago by a former Direct Rule Minister. We await the outcome of the consultation on this proposal and the drafting of the various legislative safeguards. These examples I hope illustrate clearly from the work of this Board the potential of the vision and positive influence which church members bring in their engagement with public education.

APPRECIATION AND THANKS

This Board also holds within its remit the important task of supporting the implementation of Safeguarding Trust in the Church of Ireland. You can read of the key work undertaken by the Child Protection Officers within the report. I would like on behalf of the Board to thank Renee English and Margaret Yarr for their professional

assistance to dioceses and parishes in what is demanding and often sensitive work. I know their helpful and reassuring guidance has been very much appreciated. We also thank Claire Geoghegan for the excellent work she undertakes in administrating the AccessNI checks for parishes throughout NI.

It gives me great pleasure to second the proposal that the Report of the Board of Education is received.