

## **GENERAL SYNOD 2014**

### **MOTION 4 – BOARD OF EDUCATION N.I.**

**Proposed by Bishop Ken Good, Bishop of Derry & Raphoe**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

#### ***MOTION***

*The General Synod notes with deep concern the continued disadvantaged position of Controlled Schools throughout Northern Ireland due to a lack of a dedicated advocacy and support body and calls upon the Minister of Education to take steps to resolve this injustice and ensure equality of treatment for all schools.*

**Proposer: Bishop Ken Good**

Speech to propose the Motion

In proposing this Motion, I will pose and seek to answer, briefly, six questions:

#### **1. What is a Controlled School?**

Controlled schools were originally those church schools which the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian and the Methodist churches agreed to transfer to the control of the State in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They are controlled by the State, through Education and Library Boards, but the three transferring churches still have statutory rights as ‘transferors’ in their management and governance. It is worth pointing out that 48% of schools in Northern Ireland are in the Controlled sector and have a Christian ethos. All Controlled Primary and non-selective Secondary schools include governors who are nominated by the three main churches.

There are a number of other sectors of schools in Northern Ireland including the Catholic Maintained sector, the Integrated sector and the Irish Medium sector. Each of these sectors has a dedicated support body, but the Controlled Sector (with its 48% of schools) does not. This is where an injustice lies.

#### **2. What is a Support Body?**

A Support Body, such as CCMS in the case of the Catholic Maintained sector, is a group funded by the government which can proactively promote its schools, can plan for their development, can support principals, teachers and governors and can provide significant assistance with school improvement.

### **3. Why do Controlled schools not have a Support Body?**

Controlled Schools are under the control of an Education and Library Board. But Boards have a responsibility to work *equally with all schools* in their area. And so they should. But the consequence of this even-handedness is that the Controlled Schools have to manage without the additional government-funded support and championing that the other sectors have now come to take for granted. Because the Boards must deliver services equitably to all types of schools the result is that, for decades now, there has been no advocate or champion for Controlled Schools.

### **4. Are sectoral support bodies not part of the Minister's plans for ESA?**

The assumption for the last two years was that they would be, and much background work has been done by a ministerial working group tasked to set up a Controlled Schools' Support Body. But in December 2013 the Minister withdrew funding for it because he felt insufficient progress was being made with the ESA (the Education and Skills Authority). Work on the Support Body was stopped in its tracks. This leaves Controlled Schools, as this Motion states, '*in a continued disadvantage position due to a lack of a dedicated advocacy and support body*'.

### **5. Who is concerned about this current injustice?**

Throughout the Controlled Sector there are concerns about this injustice. The working group sounded out the views of a wide range of principals and governors of Controlled schools and found strong backing for a support body. This motion is a common one being presented at this year's General Synod, Presbyterian General Assembly and Methodist Conference because the three Churches are very concerned about the *status quo* and this historic inequality persisting.

### **6. What are the churches asking of the Minister of Education?**

The churches merely seek the same support for Controlled Schools as other sectors have enjoyed for some time. This is a plea for equality of treatment, a plea for the ending of an injustice. We have for decades pointed out this disadvantaged position of Controlled schools and asked for parity for all sectors of schools.

We say to the Minister that whether the way forward is through ESA or restructured Boards, the Controlled Sector urgently needs a support body. It needs a body which will provide it with coherence and the ability to represent the full family of Controlled schools.

These schools need an *advocate* who will help to plan their future around area based planning, a *promoter* who will clearly and regularly hold up successful schools and share good practice, a *critical friend* who will work with any of the family of Controlled schools which need to see an improvement in standards, a *visionary* to develop their

unique Christian ethos and a **leader** who will work with other sectors to see that shared education is developed.

It is not only my conviction but also the conviction of our sister churches that this wrong needs to be put right, this injustice needs to be rectified, and so I thank members of Synod for their attentiveness to this issue and urge them to support the Motion.