

GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Report of the Board of Education Proposer: Miss Frances Boyd

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Introduction

The world of education is one which is constantly evolving and changing. Sometimes the pace of change is frustratingly slow – and seems to be very closely allied to political interests and ideologies – and yet those committed professionals involved at the chalkface seem to be constantly urged to implement change - change that is intended to bring about improvement for learners but which often comes at huge cost – financial, professional and emotional. It is important that we do not, as a Church, lose sight of this as we strive to bring into being an education system which will bring about the very best outcomes for all our children and young people.

The Board of Education in Northern Ireland welcomed in 2015 Dr Peter Hamill as its new Secretary, succeeding the Revd. Canon Ian Ellis, now Rector of Rossorry Parish in Clogher Diocese. Dr Hamill appears to have settled well in his new role and has been working steadily since his appointment last summer to address the current aims of the Board as articulated on page 253 of the report. The Board appreciates the work he has been engaged in and wishes him well in what is a crucial and complex role.

Education

One of the most significant developments in education in Northern Ireland during 2015 was the introduction of the Shared Education Bill in November. The term shared education is a relatively new one and perhaps work still needs to be done in defining it. The Board in making its submission to the Northern Ireland Assembly committee through the Transferors' Representative Council in November chose to define it as 'two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of

resources and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.’

Shared education is, however, an evolving area, many examples of good practice are already in existence and firmly established across Northern Ireland and local evidence already gathered shows that participants in high quality shared education are more open to meeting others with differing perspectives and opinions and show improved skills in critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision-making, all of which are integral to the Northern Ireland Curriculum. What is important is that shared education is tailored and relevant to local contexts and that it is deep, meaningful and sustained.

The Board of Education welcomed the Shared Education Bill and was, as has already been mentioned, part of a TRC delegation which gave evidence to the Education Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

One of the most significant aspects of the Shared Education Bill is that it gives the same status to the formation of jointly managed schools as it does to that of any other outcome of shared education such as shared campuses and integrated status.

The Jointly Managed Faith Schools document was published by the Department of Education in April last year. It outlines the conditions under which a Catholic maintained school may amalgamate with a controlled school to form a new faith school which would have the Christian faith at its heart. It would not be a watering down of faith – but rather a celebration of it – acknowledging the values of the different traditions and ensuring that Christian faith is central to the new school. The Board of Education looks forward to such a school coming to fruition in the near future and is currently engaged through TRC in ongoing discussions with schools interested in pursuing this model. A jointly managed faith school must come from the grassroots though – with the two communities coming together naturally with a desire to preserve their Christian heritage in their school.

The Education Authority in Northern Ireland continues to establish its role and function. The Board wishes to thank the Revd. Amanda Adams for all her hard work and skills used and shown in representing the Church of Ireland on the Board of the Education Authority. There is still a great deal of work to be done and the Board of Education watches with interest to see how a number of key areas develop.

During the year the Board of Education in Northern Ireland set out to examine the issues surrounding the current process for children moving from primary to secondary education. On initial examination it was felt that although this is a pressing issue there are wider issues that the Church should be considering.

The Board of Education (Northern Ireland) went on, though, to develop and publish an overview of seven key principles which they feel must underpin the Church's approach to education. The full text explaining the principles can be found as Appendix 6 on page 277 of the Book of Reports and should be essential bedtime reading!

Very briefly the principles are:

1. Equality of Regard – as created in the image of God, each child is of inestimable and equal value in God's sight and as such has the right to equality of regard throughout his or her education.
2. Equality of Provision – in terms of identifying and measuring effectiveness there is an urgent need not just to define and agree what constitutes a quality educational experience but also to develop ways of accurately and fairly measuring school effectiveness.
3. Still under Equality of Provision it is important that resources are allocated fairly. At present there are huge disparities in this area which need to be addressed.
4. Again under Equality of Provision – it is imperative that all our children and young people receive quality teaching from well trained, dedicated teachers who are themselves committed to lifelong learning. Recent budget cuts to in service teacher training and continuing professional development undoubtedly represent a serious impediment to maintaining and improving the quality of classroom practice.
5. Still on Equality of Provision, the effectiveness of any school also rests on the quality of leadership that exists there. Huge expectations are made of school principals who are expected not just to be model practitioners, but also motivational leaders, effective communicators and competent administrators. Huge expectations are also made of school governors, the vast majority of whom are volunteers. It is imperative that all who are involved in leadership are properly supported.
6. The sixth principle is Equality of Opportunity. All subjects need to be respected. Vocational and skills based subjects must not be regarded as being of lesser merit than academic subjects.
7. The final principle is one of co-operation and progression. The working group recognised that education does not exist in a vacuum but rather depends on the co-operation and involvement of many stakeholders, including the Churches, parents, employers and government. The Church has an important lobbying role to play and should insist on properly resourced implementation of change to ensure consistency of application and robust evaluation of educational initiatives.

The Board of Education will be further debating these principles and with colleagues from the South will work towards creating a set of principles of education that the Church of Ireland can adopt across the whole of the island.

Children's Ministry

The Board of Education is keen to develop support for children's ministry at parish level. A training programme run over three weekends and involving twenty participants began in Omagh last week in conjunction with the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. It is hoped to develop the CORE skills in the Children's Ministry Training Programme across the island in the next few years.

The Board of Education is also currently planning training with the Bible Reading Fellowship for September in Belfast, Dublin and the North West.

The Board of Education has been working closely with the Children's Ministry Network and the Sunday School Society in developing a long term strategy for children's ministry. Canon Sloane will give more details of this in his seconding of this report.

Safeguarding

During the year the Board of Education carried out a review of Safeguarding Trust to which 170 parishes responded. Generally speaking, Safeguarding Trust is held in a positive light and parishes are implementing policies and procedures effectively. There is work to be done, however, particularly with online resources and the Board will endeavour to improve this service as part of the new edition of Safeguarding Trust. Results of the survey will be posted in the next few weeks and certainly before the summer break.

There is great concern about the impact of technology on our young people and we have therefore developed a new e-policy dealing with technology. This policy has been developed in conjunction with the three other main denominations and with the PSNI and will be launched as part of the new version of Safeguarding Trust which should be ready by the end of 2016. The new version will be designed to fit into existing folders and all the resources will be available online in an updated version of the website. This should help to minimise costs.

The safeguarding officers continue to provide training for clergy, panel members and volunteers. The Board would like to thank Mrs Yarr and Mrs English for their hard work in this key area. Although much of the work they do in offering advice and dealing with issues that arise is unseen, their expertise is highly valued and their work hugely appreciated.

Dr Hamill has been representing the Church of Ireland at the Faith Based Interest Group for the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. SBNI is a statutory body which oversees child protection in Northern Ireland . The Faith Based Interest Group is organising a conference for those involved in safeguarding in the faith sector in Northern Ireland on 2nd June in Ballymena. The Archbishop of Armagh will lead a group of 30 Church of Ireland representatives from the North. The keynote speaker is Bishop Mark Sowerby, Bishop of Horsham, an adviser to the Church of England House of Bishops on safeguarding. In Northern Ireland, we now have legislation on safeguarding adults and the Board of Education is currently working on launching a policy for safeguarding adults as soon as possible. For adult safeguarding we will have to appoint safeguarding champions who will take on roles similar to that of a parish panel – but on a wider diocesan level. Full details on this will be launched by the autumn term. With the addition of adult safeguarding legislation the Church will need to consider the place of safeguarding and how it fits within the current structures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Board of Education continues to work hard on promoting the rights of children and supporting those who work with them at both parish and school level. The Board would like to thank all parishes for their support – both financial through the annual appeal and also through their interaction and engagement. It is very important that we are aware of the needs of parishes and how we can support them most effectively.