

# GENERAL SYNOD 2016

## Report of the General Synod Board of Education Seconded: The Revd Canon Niall Sloane

**Embargoed Against Delivery  
Check Against Delivery**

Your Grace/Bishop

The Report is before you and as you will see, it is quite extensive. So in the short time available to me I don't propose to go into it in any great detail but just to note some of the major developments in the field of education over the last twelve months:

### **1. Religious Education**

An area of particular interest to us as a Church community which is directly involved in the provision of education in the Republic is that of Religious Education. As members will know, the current RE curriculum in primary schools is the Follow Me curriculum, which is provided on behalf of the patrons. As you will see from the Report, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has issued proposal for a new curriculum in the area of religious education. This is very significant development as it marks the first time that that the Irish State has sought to have its own religious education curriculum taught in schools. The content of the proposed NCCA curriculum is problematic because it approaches faith and religious belief and practice from a detached, objectified perspective and expects the teacher to adopt that approach in the delivery of the curriculum. Clearly this differs from an experiential approach and would appear to be at odds with the expression of an ethos that envisages the school community living the Christian life in a full and meaningful way. I would urge members to brief themselves on this issue by reading the section of the Report on this and referring to the NCCA website.

### **2. Developments on Vetting**

The second major development that occurred is the commencement of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable) Persons Act on 29 April 2016 which placed Garda vetting on a statutory footing.

From 29 April 2016, it will be a criminal offence, other than in certain limited circumstances, for an organisation to engage a new employee or volunteer to undertake relevant work or activities with children or vulnerable persons without first obtaining a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau in respect of that person.

Child protection is taken very seriously within the Church and we welcome and congratulate the State authorities on this development. In that regard, may I also pay tribute to the work of Mrs Renée English, our child protection officer here in the Republic, who is retiring in a few months' time. During her time as CPO, Renée has become a valuable resource and support for all clergy and SGT panel members. On behalf of the Board of Education and all of you, may I thank her for all her work for the Church and wish her well in the future.

Finally, I turn to an area which has been identified as a key area of development for the future life of the Church: children's ministry. I am delighted to report that last year discussions began about putting in place a long-term sustainable plan for children's ministry rooted firmly within central church. Naturally, there is a lot of work to be done ensuring that whatever model is put in place is financially viable, well-resourced and structured in a creative and suitable manner for the future. Furthermore, I am happy to report that the Sunday School Society for Ireland is a key partner in these conversations and, although it is a body independent of the Church of Ireland, the Society has indicated its willingness to be a key financial stakeholder in this project when it is satisfied that all the necessary steps to ensure long-term viability are in place.

In light of this work, I am bringing to this Synod a motion concerning children's ministry which I hope and pray will meet with whole-hearted and unanimous support from its members.

Your Grace/Bishop, I am happy to second the General Synod Board of Education report.