



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Education Bill: Northern Ireland Commission  
for Catholic Education/Council for Catholic  
Maintained Schools

12 December 2012

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Michaela Boyle  
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr Sean Rogers  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Mr Jim Clarke	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Mr Gerry Lundy	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Father Tim Bartlett	Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education
Bishop Donal McKeown	Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education
Sister Eithne Woulfe	Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education

**The Chairperson:** Bishop, I apologise for the delay. I know that you have other commitments, and apologies for the way in which we held you all back. The other issues ran on. You are very welcome. We are delighted that you are here and look forward to a discussion with you. We had discussions with you in the past and we look forward to having a constructive discussion again this morning.

I also ask you to pass on to Bishop McAreavey our sincere thoughts at this time. I understand that he has had another death in his family, and I know that he is on sabbatical. I spoke to him some time ago. On behalf of the Committee, I want to assure him that he and the extended family continue to be in our thoughts and prayers.

**Bishop Donal McKeown (Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education):** Thank you very much, Chair. We are unsure about the time schedule. I had been told initially that it was 9.00 am, and I have an arrangement to be at the BBC for 12.30 pm, which I cannot really get around. We are representative of 45% of the pupils in Northern Ireland schools, and I do not know whether half an hour is sufficient for us to really engage.

**The Chairperson:** You will have as much time as you want to take.

**Father Tim Bartlett (Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education):** Chair, we do not have that time. We all have other commitments scheduled. We were originally told 9.00 am, and it became

10.30 am at the last minute. We have been here since 10.15 am, and the Governing Bodies Association (GBA) representatives told us that they were scheduled for 11.00 am.

**The Chairperson:** They are scheduled for 12.15 pm.

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** They thought it was 11.00 am.

**The Chairperson:** So what would you prefer to do? Do you want to come back another time?

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** Would that be possible? We would prefer that in the circumstances, and the GBA representatives are waiting downstairs, so you would not be left with a hiatus. Would it be possible for us to reschedule for very shortly after Christmas?

**The Chairperson:** It will create a difficulty in that we are planning to have line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill. That will become a very important piece of our work. The contribution during this discussion is vital to inform us as to how we can progress in the line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill. It will postpone all of that further, which would have implications, because there is an issue as to how quickly we progress the Bill. We have gone for an extension, and I have given an assurance in the House that that extension will not be used until the final date. That is the only difficulty that is created, but if you have time, I am quite happy for you to make the presentation and then reschedule to come back. It is up to you. You decide what you want to do.

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** We want to be as co-operative as possible, but we feel that we have a number of points that we would like to chew through with you. The format we had in mind was that I would make general comments on what we are trying to achieve with the Bill for the good of young people in Northern Ireland, and then we would begin to talk about the areas that we have concerns about in order to enable that Bill to best deliver for all of us. In that sense, the two parts hang together. This man has to go to do an interview as well.

**Mr Rogers:** That was the point that I was going to make. From our point of view, it is difficult to have a half-hour presentation now and then try to link it to another day. It is up to you, but my personal preference is to reschedule this.

**Mr Sheehan:** I propose that we reschedule it as well. I do not want to put Bishop McKeown in the invidious position of having to make a decision after you outlining the difficulties. It would be much better if we made the decision.

**Mr Lunn:** Just to complicate it further, I am perfectly happy to see it rescheduled, but there are actually two organisations here. Are you happy enough to do it jointly, or would you prefer to make separate presentations?

**Mr Jim Clarke (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):** That decision was made for us.

**Sister Eithne Woulfe (Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education):** It was not our decision. Initially, we would have proposed that we would have come as the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education and separately as the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

**Mr Lunn:** Who made the decision?

**Sister Eithne Woulfe:** It was a joint invitation.

**Mr Lunn:** That is what I am asking you. Now you can express a view about it.

**Father Tim Bartlett:** It came from this end.

**Mr Lunn:** I know, I have gathered that, but I am asking what your preference would be, since it is going to be rescheduled anyway.

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** Ultimately, we are saying the same things, but two meetings would have given an opportunity from the point of view of the theoreticians and then from the —

**The Chairperson:** We have now spent five minutes discussing this. Even if we have until 12.15 pm, which is three quarters of an hour, that is time in which we were to break for lunch and then have the presentation from the GBA after that. Do we want to use that time wisely? We are not trying to say that we will constrain when it comes to raising the issues when you come back. It is entirely your decision. The Committee will accommodate what you feel is more appropriate for you, bearing in mind that there are two submissions, which, from what I see, are very similar though not identical.

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** From the feeling that I got around the table, there is a sense that this deserves longer engagement than squeezing things in, and chopping it up would not be the best way. We would prefer that as well, if that is OK with you, and we are happy to arrange a time as early as possible in January.

**The Chairperson:** That will create an issue for the Committee Clerk, who will have to see the knock-on effect that it has on the time that we have allocated for the clause-by-clause scrutiny. As long as members and everybody else are aware that any other delay is not the result of any of us trying to delay this for the sake of delay. We are trying to make sure that everybody is accommodated and given the time that they require.

**Sister Eithne Woulfe:** I do not think that there is any intention on our part to being party to delaying anything. We certainly recognise the need for this to progress as quickly and as effectively as possible. Nonetheless, it is wiser to take the dedicated time and the extended time that might be needed to engage in it in a meaningful and purposeful way. We appreciate you allowing us the freedom to seek rescheduling, and we thank you all for that.

**The Chairperson:** For clarity, and so that you are happy, would you prefer CCMS to come on its own? Or, do you want to do it the same way as today?

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** We can talk among ourselves about what we want to do. We have come to this stage now, and we will agree it with the Committee Clerk.

**The Chairperson:** Yes, after this today.

Obviously, this is ultimately a Committee decision. Are members content that we proceed on that basis?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:** I apologise again for the delay. However, it is not uncommon. When Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta was here last week, I was very conscious that it was very constrained in the time that it got. There have been issues, and I am always very conscious of that, despite what some members may think about the number of questions that I ask. However, that is the role of the Committee, and if it has to take more time, then it will have to take more time.

**Bishop Donal McKeown:** These are busy days for all of us just before Christmas. Perhaps immediately or shortly thereafter, we will ensure that we leave a longer time and we will not take on other commitments with statutory bodies.

**The Chairperson:** Having taken more time, it will be interesting to see whether we will be any wiser. Thank you.

**Sister Eithne Woulfe:** Time will tell. I wish you all a happy Christmas.

**Some Members:** Thank you.