

Hazelwood Integrated Primary School

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Principal: *Mrs Patricia Murtagh*



25th January, 2013

FAO: Chair
Education Committee
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Chair,

I write on behalf of APTIS (Association of Principals Teaching in Integrated Schools). We note that the Education Bill to establish ESA is at present in committee stage in the Assembly. We wish to bring to your attention the following grave concerns we have with this Bill in its present form.

Both the Education Reform Order (1989) and the Belfast Agreement (1998) place an obligation on the Department of Education to “encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education that is the education together of Catholic and Protestant children”

Under clause 2(5) of the Education Bill, there is a duty on ESA to encourage and facilitate the development of education in an Irish speaking school but no corresponding duty on ESA regarding integrated education.

APTIS argues that the Education Bill must be amended to enshrine this statutory obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education in the bill. The recognition of the importance of developing integrated education as recognized in previous legislation must not be ignored in this bill.

There is no representation for integrated education on the board, as constituted at the moment, the board reflects the segregated nature of our educational system and divided society. In order to meet the statutory obligation referred to above it is essential that there must be representation from the integrated movement on the board.

Many Integrated Schools are oversubscribed and turn away hundreds of children each year. Where is the representation on ESA for the staff, children and families who are part of an integrated school and the much greater number of the wider public who support this type of education? It is inequitable and unjust that those choosing Integrated Education should be denied representation on the Board of ESA. The insight and experience of those who have worked in the Integrated Sector would prove invaluable in ensuring that the bill is effective and inclusive.

APTIS requests representation for the integrated sector, as of right, on the board of ESA.

The Education Bill outlines responsibilities under Area Based Planning for the establishment of new controlled and new Catholic Maintained schools but there appears to be no mechanism for the establishment of new integrated schools either controlled or grant maintained. It is not clear how a new integrated school might open under ESA or how parental demand for integration might be supported under ESA.

APTIS argues that the mechanism for opening new integrated schools must be written into the Education Bill. Integrated schools undoubtedly are part of the future of our education system if parental choice is to have any recognition.

APTIS along with the wider integrated movement has grave concerns about the limitations of ABP as the model used to date to frame the area based planning process, based as it is on a sectarian headcount of children within the straitjacket of the existing sectors.

APTIS argues there should be a duty on ESA to maximize opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools. The opportunities for creating integrated schools through this process must not be missed.

APTIS understands that the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education has submitted a number of amendments which would write into the bill an acknowledgement of the statutory obligation to facilitate and encourage Integrated Education and which would ensure representation for Integrated Education on the board. APTIS registers their support of these amendments.

Finally, we see an opportunity in ESA to shape a new educational landscape, one which does not reflect or further embed the divisions of the past. We seek assurance that every

step will be taken to ensure that ESA can play a positive role in shaping such a future. With input from representation of integrated education it is more likely that we will be fit to face the challenges of a shared future in a real and meaningful way.

The omission of this commitment from the Bill and the almost total failure to mention Integrated Education in any parts of the Bill is striking and concerning. We trust our concerns will be acted on and that this situation will be rectified.

Yours Sincerely

Patricia Murtagh

Chair to APTIS