



**The Royal Belfast Academical Institution
College Square East
Belfast
BT1 6DL**

20 November 2012

The Clerk to the Committee for Education
Northern Ireland Assembly
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Dear Sir

Committee Stage of the Education Bill

It has only recently come to the notice of the Board of Governors of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI) that the closing date for written submissions to the Committee in respect of the Education Bill was 16th November 2012. I apologise for not meeting that deadline. I would be grateful if you would accept this submission notwithstanding that it has passed the closing date.

RBAI is a voluntary grammar school in the centre of Belfast. It is one of the two voluntary grammar schools which is categorised as a "B" school, the other being Campbell College, Belfast. The significance of category "B" is that schools within that category do not take, and do not receive, any funding from the Department of Education for capital expenditure.

The School has considerable concerns about the Education Bill, and the adverse effect which it will have on the delivery of education in Northern Ireland. Its concerns are as follows:-

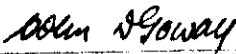
1. The tenor of the Bill is centralisation of the management of Schools, and a clear movement away from is what is known as "the voluntary principal" which has served the provision of post-primary education in Northern Ireland so well for many years;
2. It makes no sense, under the guise of RPA to create a huge bureaucracy which will inevitably require a greater proportion of the Northern Ireland education budget to fund that bureaucracy, reducing the amount of the budget which will be available in the "front line" for the delivery of education in the classroom;
3. The powers assumed by ESA lead to a greater centralisation of the education functions. This has been found to

be regressive in England; in that jurisdiction powers are being transferred from the centre to the individual schools. The experience in England is that decentralisation provides a better model for the management of schools. Boards of governors are best equipped to decide what is in the interests of schools and how powers of management of schools should best be deployed.

4. Boards of governors should remain the employers of the staff in their schools. If a teacher's contract of employment is with a central authority, rather than with the school in which he is employed, there is an inevitable weakening of the cohesion within the school between the staff, the Board of Governors and the pupils. The sense of identity suffers. No case has been put, let alone made out, as to why it is necessary for Boards of Governors to cease to be the employing authority for staff.
5. The Bill affords no role to any sectoral body for voluntary grammar schools, and voluntary grammar schools are not represented within ESA. That this should be the case when voluntary grammar schools educate approximately one third of children in post primary education is inexplicable. It is discriminatory.
6. There is no meaningful role for voluntary grammar schools in Area Planning. There is no obligation on ESA to consult grammar schools in that process. This is of particular concern to RBAI. RBAI is in a unique position as it is the only school situated in the centre of the capital city of Northern Ireland. As such, it always has drawn, and continues to draw, its pupils from many areas of Belfast, Lagan Valley, North Down, South Antrim, East Antrim and indeed further afield. Accordingly there should be an obligation on ESA when engaging in area planning to consult with any school which draws pupils from a particular area notwithstanding that such school is not within the particular area.
7. RBAI has a particular concern with Section 20 of the Bill which gives ESA power to enter into contracts for and in connection with the provision or alteration of the premises of a grant-aided school. RBAI owns its own buildings and has not received any assistance from the Department of Education in the provision of those buildings; all its buildings have been funded from its own resources. In those circumstances, it is completely unacceptable and unjustifiable that ESA should have any power to contract to alter such buildings. Further, it is also unacceptable and unjustifiable that ESA should contract to provide buildings on the site owned by RBAI. Section 20 is clearly inappropriate to any category "B" school and should, therefore, be disappplied to such schools.

The Board would be grateful for an opportunity to appear before the Committee and I should be obliged if you would let me know if the Committee would be prepared to hear evidence from the Board and the date and time when such an appearance may take place.

Yours faithfully



Colin D Gowdy LL.B
Chairman