

P J Coby Esq
 Northern Ireland Office
 Government Buildings
 Great George Street
 LONDON
 SW1P 3AJ

You sent to the Department of Education on 20 August some correspondence concerning Lady Fisher's interest in Lagan College and her desire to engage the Holy See's interest in this project, and asked for our comments.

I should give first of all a word of background about Lagan College which was opened in September 1981 as an independent school by the All Children Together Charitable Trust, which describes itself as existing "for the advancement of integrated education by consent in Northern Ireland". The school is intended as an integrated post-primary, all-ability, 11-18 college for boys and girls. The initial enrolment consisted of 29 boys and girls aged between 11 and 13 years. It has just begun its second year of operation and the total enrolment is understood to be 83 pupils. The school does not yet have permanent accommodation. It initially operated on a temporary basis in a Boy Scout Activity Centre in South Belfast. It has now moved to premises at a former primary school which it has leased from one of the Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards. Lagan College has been granted provisional registration by this Department as an independent school, and it has been Government policy to give the College whatever assistance it can consistent with its status as an independent school. As an independent school in Northern Ireland, however, Lagan College does not receive any grants from public funds. Parents contribute according to their means up to £600 per annum and support has been forthcoming from private trusts. A public appeal, with a target of £2m, was launched by Lord Dunleath in the House of Lords in May 1982. The sponsors would, of course, wish to have access to assistance from public funds as soon as possible. They appreciate, however, that at a time when there will be an increasing surplus of secondary school places, justification for a new secondary school would have to be on the basis of substantial parental demand for the school. They intend, therefore, to wait until they can demonstrate such support by the size of the intakes in the first 3 years or so before submitting an application for grant-aided status. The sponsors are an energetic and highly-motivated group of people and they ensure that the activities of Lagan College and its aims are given maximum publicity. They have the active assistance of such people as Lord Dunleath, Lady Ewart-Biggs and Lady Fisher who has written to you.

Mr Griffiths, in his letter to Mr Snozell, said that it would be useful for the British Embassy to the Holy See to know "the official reaction of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland to the initiative". In fact there has been no "official" reaction from the hierarchy to the establishment of Lagan College. Cardinal O'Fiaich was reported in the local press in March of this year as having

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said on a radio programme that he was not opposed to experiments in integrated education in Northern Ireland and that Lagan College was worth trying. However, the Cardinal's secretary wrote to the press soon after this to say that the Cardinal had been quoted out of context. He denied that the Cardinal had said either that he was not opposed to integrated education or that Lagan College was an experiment worth trying. I enclose copies of the relevant press cuttings for your information.

With regard to Lady Fisher's desire to see the Vatican taking an interest in the Lagan College project, we do not think that this is a realistic proposition. The Irish hierarchy's policy that Catholic children should receive a Catholic education and that such education can be properly provided for them only in Catholic schools is not peculiar to Northern Ireland. It is certainly not a policy from which the Vatican would dissent and we see no likelihood that the Vatican authorities would be persuaded to become involved in this matter. In any case, we agree with Mr Bohill of PAD, whose letter of 23 August you will have received, that any such involvement could well be counter-productive to the cause of integrated education.

I am copying this minute to Mr Bohill, Miss Owens and Mrs Robinson.

EVE STEWART (MRS)
PS/Mr Scott

16 September 1982