

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

FROM: P CARVILL
Permanent Secretary
DENI

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Minister of State (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Semple
Mr Ledlie
Mr Pilling
Mr Alston
Mr Hill
Mr Holmes
Mr Wallace
Mr R Holmes

PS/PAYMASTER GENERAL (B&L)

ARCHBISHOP DALY

1. The attached briefs and background papers (not to copy recipients) for the meeting with Archbishop Daly and his colleagues on 29 April are inevitably rather long, given the range and complexity of the issues which the Archbishop wishes to raise. It may help if I highlight the main features.

Background

2. The general tone of the Archbishop's approach to these issues may prove to be somewhat negative. For a number of reasons he and his colleagues may feel that their position is under threat, and that a series of separate developments over a range of education issues is indicative of a general desire on the part of Government to erode the Church's position. We suspect that in requesting the meeting with the Secretary of State he is seeking reassurance on these points, and at the same time looking to secure an improvement in the financial position of the Roman Catholic school authorities.

3. Instances of recent policy developments which the Archbishop will feel are inimical to the Church's interests are:

(a) **Integrated education**

The Bishops felt strongly that the provisions of the Education Reform Order in respect of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools were

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

prejudicial to Catholic education. They challenged the constitutionality of the legislation by judicial review; the resulting court judgement was so unambiguously supportive of the Government's position that (as far as we know) they no longer entertain any thought of appealing it. But the issue still rankles with them.

(b) Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

The concept of the CCMS pre-dated the Education Reform Order. Initially the Bishops probably saw it as being akin to an Education Area Board for the maintained sector. This was no doubt an overstatement of even the pre Education Reform position. However, there is no doubt that the Reforms, with their much greater emphasis on the individual school as the prime unit of both financial and curricular management, greatly limited the scope for CCMS to take an interventionist role in the affairs of individual schools. The full implications of this for the staffing, funding, and raison d'etre of CCMS have still to work themselves out, but again the Bishops perception is that the Government has gone back on early promises.

(c) Teacher Training

St Mary's teacher training college caters mainly for the needs of primary schools. It and Stranmillis between them cater for 80% of the primary schools demand. However that demand is projected to decline in the years immediately ahead, and their intakes have been cut accordingly. The Bishops are very suspicious that the Government is seeking to erode the viability of the college. This fear dates back to the attempts that were made in the early 1980's to bring the then two Catholic colleges (St Mary's and St Joseph's) together on the Stranmillis campus. It is true that the Government gave up those attempts only with great reluctance and in the face of a very concerted campaign by the Bishops; but the agreement that was then reached - that a separate merged Catholic teacher training college would continue to be supported - has been fully honoured.

(d) **Funding**

Recent work commissioned by SACHR has drawn attention to the fact that, historically, Catholic schools have on the whole been less well funded than controlled schools and have achieved less good results. SACHR favours (by implication) higher funding of Catholic schools (ie 100% capital grants instead of 85%) and the Bishops no doubt wish to call this in aid in a bid for higher grants and a skewing of resources towards the maintained sector. The latter is already being delivered (in LMS and formula funding, which is inherently more equitable); but enhanced capital grant rates need to be seen in the wider context of the overall arrangements for the ownership and control of voluntary schools.

Capital Grants

£46.5m p.a.

4. The main issue on which the Bishops are likely to focus is a request for higher capital grants (at or close to 100%). In principle, we can sympathise with their view that the current 15% voluntary contribution is a hard burden on what are often some of the least well-off sections of the community; and it would be in keeping with the Government's general objective of Targeting Social Need if some way could be found of relieving them of their burden. In practice it may be difficult to do this without some concession on the part of the Bishops on their control of school management; which they may be loth to make, even though they have hinted at it in the past and even though we know (in confidence) that Bishop Edward Daly would probably be prepared to do so. And even if we were prepared, in the interests of TSN and of enhancing the standards of physical provision of Catholic schools, to move unilaterally on grant rates, this is arguably the sort of long-term policy decision that should not be made just now, when political talks aimed at the creation of devolved administration - which would have its own views on such issues - are under way.

5. The Bishops will hardly expect the Secretary of State to give any immediate commitment. Their interest, and ours, will probably be best served by an agreement that both sides should consider their positions on the related

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

issues of management arrangements and funding rates, and review the possibilities for change. Our aim should be to place the onus on the Bishops to make positive and detailed proposals embracing both of these aspects - which we could agree to consider sympathetically.

Objectives

6. I suggest that the Secretary of State's general objectives in the meeting should be:

- (a) to demonstrate an understanding of the factors which have given rise to the Bishops concerns;
- (b) to give them reassurance that the Government is fully supportive of their legitimate position as sponsors of Catholic education, and has no intention of eroding that position;
- (c) at the same time to convey the message that the Government also has to have regard to other legitimate interests and concerns; and that the settled thrust of Government policy on education reform (including integrated education) is now part of the overall framework of educational arrangements and objectives into which the Catholic schools system, as much as any other schools, has to fit itself.

7. On the main specific issues which the Bishops may raise, I suggest the Secretary of State's aims in discussion should be as follows:

(a) **Teacher Training**

- to confirm our continued willingness to support a viable Catholic teacher training college for primary schools
- to avoid giving the Bishops any reason to hope for an expansion of the college's (very modest) role in relation to secondary schools, and to say that we believe the primary demand, even at current and foreseeable levels, will still support a viable

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

college

- to reassure the Bishops that we are still committed to supporting a major extension to St Mary's college to allow it to operate on a single site
- to emphasise our strong desire to press on with the much-needed provision of new premises for two large secondary schools in West Belfast (which is dependent on the release of what is at present one of St Mary's two sites).

(b) Capital Grants

- to remind the Bishops that over the years grant rates and management arrangements have been seen as inseparably linked
- to remind the Bishops that they themselves had in the recent past contemplated a reduction in the Trustees control over schools in return for higher grants
- to place the onus on the Bishops to make proposals for changes in the management structure as a corollary to enhanced grants
- to avoid commitment to any such proposal which the Bishops may table, but to agree to consider it; and/or to suggest further meetings at official level to tease out the details of what they may have in mind.

(c) Availability of Grammar School Places

- to take the opportunity to ask the Bishops if they have views on the desirability of further increasing the number of grammar school places available to Catholic pupils

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

- to suggest that the particular problem of the pressure on such places in the Belfast area should be looked at in detail by the Catholic school authorities and the Department of Education by setting up a joint working group to bring forward proposals.



P CARVILL

25 April 1991