



1. Mr. B. Hill <sup>post.</sup>  
2. Dr. Brown



**FROM: DON HILL**  
*Deputy Secretary, Schools*

*To see + PA. pl.  
12/11*

**DATE: 18 November 1997**

cc **Mrs Jendoubi**  
**Mr McVeigh**

**MR FERGUSON**  
**CENTRAL SECRETARIAT**

**CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES: EDUCATION**

1. As requested, I attach a background note and line to take on the two issues identified.
2. Like you I don't know what line might be taken on programmes to discourage sectarianism and I am not sure what more can realistically be done.
3. On the provision of Irish-medium education there will be pressure to reduce viability levels and make grant-aided status easier to achieve. Similar pleas are coming from the integrated sector, which is treated on the same basis as IM education, regardless of our statutory duty to promote and encourage integrated education. There are good educational reasons to avoid small schools but in any case such easement is simply not affordable under existing resource constraints. It would certainly be **very difficult** to justify easement on IM education on its own and easement on both would be very costly.

*Don Hill*

**R D HILL**

*P.S. I have just seen your fax on the response to No 10 and I am extremely content.*

**Encs**

*[Signature]*

A.M.V.  
No 178/18

## **EQUALITY IN THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION, ESPECIALLY THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF IRISH**

### **LINE TO TAKE**

- Irish-medium provision will receive 100% grant aid if it is demonstrated to be **viable** and to provide effective education; 95% of existing provision is grant-aided.
- viability levels are kept under review and reflect both affordability and educational considerations regarding the optimum size of schools.
- grant-aided Irish-medium provision has full equality in terms of recurrent and capital funding, Initial Teacher Training and curriculum support.

### **BACKGROUND**

1. **Viability Criteria:** The Department requires a school to demonstrate that it can achieve a minimum long-term enrolment of 150-175 pupils, in primary schools (by enrolling at least 25 pupils for 2 years) and in secondary schools (by enrolling at least 100 pupils for 2 years). These are the same viability criteria as are applied to integrated schools.
2. **Existing Provision:** Seven primary schools and one secondary school (total: xxx pupils) currently receive 100% recurrent grant-aid totalling some £2m. Four independent primary schools and one independent secondary school (total: xxx pupils) receive no grant aid. Over 95% of the 1,200 pupils being educated through the medium of Irish are in schools in receipt of 100% recurrent grant-aid.
3. **IM Satellites and Streams:** In addition to free-standing schools, an Irish-medium unit in Armagh was approved in 1995. Two such units have developed to the point where they have now been established as free-standing grant-aided schools.

4. **EU Funding:** A number of successful applications have been made by Irish-medium schools and interest groups for support from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. Grants to the value of £722k have been approved so far.

5. **Provision for teachers:** The Department has funded a development officer at St Mary's College of Education to develop teaching materials and a special 4-year BEd (Primary) Course. A central support unit is being established by the 5 Boards in Belfast to provide ongoing curriculum support.

6. **Examinations:** Irish-medium examinations are offered at GCSE in 8 subjects and a request for A-levels through the medium of Irish is presently under consideration.

7. **Ulster Irish College:** Meanscoil Dhoire, the **independent** Irish-medium secondary school in Londonderry, has an enrolment of only 55 pupils - well short of the viability targets for grant-aided status. Irish-medium interests have suggested that a natural solution to the problem of recognition and funding would be to accept Meanscoil Dhoire as a subsidiary campus of Meanscoil Feirste, Belfast, which had an enrolment of 179 in October 1996. [NB: No formal proposal for grant-aid has been made.] The Department has asked the schools to provide more details. [NOT FOR USE: Given that the schools are 70 miles apart this arrangement seems neither sensible nor workable.]

8. **A statutory body for Irish-medium education:** The Department has rejected a suggestion that Gaeloiliuint should be established and funded as a statutory body to promote and manage Irish-medium education, similar to NICIE for integrated education. This is considered unnecessary (on educational, financial and administrative grounds) for such a small sector. There are a number of central bodies with an interest in Irish-medium education and Government is happy to have discussions with all of them without adding to the plethora of existing statutory bodies.

## DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMES IN SCHOOLS TO DISCOURAGE SECTARIANISM

### LINE TO TAKE

- This is an important element of the NI statutory curriculum and the extra-statutory curriculum for pupils aged 4-16;
- Self-respect, respect for others and greater understanding are fostered through the cross-curricular themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage and the core syllabus for religious understanding;
- The cross-community contact scheme encourages schools from different traditions to work closely together.

### BACKGROUND NOTE

1. The statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum, introduced for schools since 1990, contributes to combating sectarianism in the following ways.
  - It has been mandatory since 1993 for all pupils to be taught the cross-curricular theme of **Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU)**: this is about fostering self-respect, respect for others, and the improvement of relations between peoples of differing cultural traditions.
  - Another cross-curricular theme is **Cultural Heritage**. In this, pupils are taught about the common experiences of their cultural heritage, the diverse and distinctive aspects of their culture and the interdependence of cultures.  
  
(The objectives of EMU and Cultural Heritage are set out in law, but they are taught in the context of all other statutory subjects.)
  - A common **history programme of study** is in place for all schools, centring on the study of the history of the British Isles within the context of broader European and world history. This is compulsory for pupils to the end of key stage 3 (form 3/age 14).
  - a **core syllabus for religious education** has been prepared by the four main churches in the province. It has been progressively introduced, and became compulsory for all pupils of compulsory school age from September this year.
2. Outside the statutory curriculum the main constituent of the programme is the **Cross-community Contact Scheme** which was introduced nine years ago to provide modest support to schools, colleges, further and higher education institutions and youth and community groups, which develop joint projects involving young people from different traditions. The emphasis is on ongoing, systematic programmes of work and activities which help to break down barriers and encourage the participants to work together for a common purpose. Although participation in the Scheme is entirely voluntary, over one-third of all Northern Ireland schools have been involved in programmes.

3. Since 1985 the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland and the Republic have co-operated in establishing and funding the **European Studies Project**. This uses modern communications technology to link schools in Northern Ireland, the Republic and mainland Britain, and, more recently, schools in European countries, to explore relationships within the British Isles and the rest of Europe in the 20th century, in particular the transition from conflict to co-operation in Europe. A quarter of all Northern Ireland post-primary schools are involved.