

ETBI BRIEF

BRIEF NO: 04/2016

To: Chief Executives and Education Officers of ETBs

Re: ETBI meeting with Catholic Church representatives, Maynooth

Date: Tuesday 16th February 2016

Attendance:

- ETBI:
- Catholic Church representatives:

ETB Second-Level Schools

- Arising from discussions with dioceses the church side (CS) had concerns about the delivery of the religious education programme in schools, in the context of Cir. 73/74 and Cir. 7/79.
- The CS emphasised the need to abide by the provisions of the DOT/MOA in Community Colleges.
- ETBI stated there is varying awareness of Cirs. 73/74 and 7/79 in schools. Designated Colleges would and should abide with the terms of the MOA/DOT because of their legal status.
- Given the reality of social and cultural change. ETB school principals need guidance in terms of the status of religious education/instruction. The new Junior Cycle programme is also relevant in this context.
- The CS expressed concern that in ETB schools (designated and non-designated) in a rapidly changing world religion is “slipping off the agenda by default”. Principals need to know of and engage with the religious education programme.
The CS also expressed concern that in many cases the principals speak for the Board. ETBI referenced recent training programmes for Boards of Management which should empower boards re their duties and role.
- The NCCA Curriculum at second level was broadly welcomed. In a secularised world religion needs to be kept alive.
- Both sides acknowledged that ETBs and their schools (designated & non-designated) articulate a multi-denominational profile – and are not non-denominational.
- ETBI acknowledged that the Church as trustee partners had a role order in defining the characteristic spirit in designated community colleges. That religions identity can be celebrated while acknowledging other religions and cultures also. School leaders in such colleges can benefit from more direction in this context.
In all ETB schools there is a need to articulate what is meant by characteristic spirit. In this context the CS expressed a wish to meet with the UL researchers working on the JMOS (agreed).
- The place of religious education in the Junior Cycle was also discussed. Having an examination at second level also placed focus on the need to define the schools’ characteristic spirit.
- It was recognised by both parties that spiritual faith is part of the whole person and that the “business of education” is also about a religious/spiritual dimension in most cases.

Community National Schools

- The CNS model was discussed. It was noted that these schools have a patrons' programme. Important also to recognise our own religious identity and culture. Noted that *Goodness Me Goodness You* programme at junior level is complete and that NCCA is working on senior (3rd to 6th class) programme. The CS feared that the programme could be "hijacked" by ERB and Ethics. The CS asked how is belief specific instruction undertaken in community national schools? How is spiritual preparation facilitated in the CNS? The CS feared that a "two tier" preparation might evolve where some Catholic students would get more sacramental education than others (in other schools). ETBI confirmed that belief specific teaching takes place in 3rd to 6th class. The CS is aware that there are significant difficulties regarding the capacity of the parish to service the school. ETBI expressed an openness to work with the Catholic parish on the mechanics of the sacramental programme.

Reconfiguration rather than Divestment

- In recent discussions between CS and DES the term divestment is being replaced with reconfiguration. This places the focus on the locality rather than the school.
- The DES has agreed that there is a need for "enticements" to support the local amalgamation process. Both Church and State will support any local community which agrees to reconfigure the patronage of local primary schools.

Joint Patronage in Community Schools

- The CS stated that there is "an inability to apply for new community schools". The DES policy is that there must be a single Catholic patron body which can apply for patronage of a new Community School. CS sought ETBI's support to address this matter i.e. the serious difficulty of religious congregations/orders transferring patronage to trust leaders e.g. Ceist.
- ETBI stated that the ETB sector had also been pushed into greater consideration through the shared service agenda.
- CS noted the WG on the Deed of Trust. The National Trustee Forum is focusing on the spectrum of Joint Patronage. represents ETBI on this Forum.
ETBI requested that a WG be established with the CS to focus initially on what is the role of ETBs as joint patrons. This work needs to happen soon and in parallel with the NTF work.

Outcomes

- We agreed the need to engage in dialogue in relation to the question of characteristic spirit, part of which would involve facilitating a meeting with the research group.
- We agreed to establish a group which could look at where we are at in relation to Religious Education provision at second level particularly in the light of the proposed Junior Cycle reform.
- Need to heighten awareness of MOA/DOT in designated colleges particularly in regard to fulfilling obligations.
- After the new government is formed to meet again about the reconfiguration protocols for national schools (divestment process).
- To review role of ETBs as joint patrons in Community Schools.

Issued by: Michael Moriarty, General Secretary

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