

TRANSFEROR REPRESENTATIVES' COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

7th December 2007

Protestant Churches petition Assembly Education Committee on the future of school governance

Office bearers of the Transferor Representatives' Council today appeared before the Assembly Education Committee, to express concern regarding future proposals for governance of controlled schools.

Currently, transferor governors (from the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches), comprise 4 out of 9 members on a controlled primary school. This right of representation on all controlled primary and secondary schools is now under serious threat due to proposals arising from the Review of Public Administration.

The Review of Public Administration (RPA) has proposed the removal of this statutory role of transferors on the ground that it purportedly contravenes equality requirements of the Northern Ireland Acts. In future, it is proposed that transferors will only have rights of representation on schools they formerly owned or which were superseded. The TRC believes that this will lead to a huge loss of rights for transferors and that the proposal will, at a stroke, remove the Christian ethos as of right from the controlled sector of education.

The TRC seeks parity of protection for the Christian ethos in schools attended generally by Protestant children, currently enjoyed in the Catholic maintained sector of education.

The effect of the proposed new reforms will be that, whilst a broad Christian ethos will be retained in Catholic schools, it will no longer be reflected in schools which pupils from the Protestant tradition will attend. Catholic schools will continue as of legal right to have faith representatives on Boards of Governors, however schools attended mainly by Protestant pupils, will be prohibited by law from having any official Church representation.

The TRC is entirely supportive of the right of Catholic schools to safeguard and protect their Christian ethos in the context of identical funding. All it seeks is that comparative arrangements

make reasonable and equitable alternative provision for the Protestant churches to continue to carry out the role they have always played in education.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Department has indicated that the RPA reforms will be implemented in a phased approach. A draft first Bill is expected quite soon; however it will not be subject to public consultation.

The TRC therefore feels it now has no option but to seek to garner support to protect this Christian ethos.

Firstly, The TRC urges the Education Committee to obtain from the Department written and urgent clarification of specifically how it has protected the Christian ethos in the controlled sector within the draft of the 1st Bill.

Secondly, in the event that the Committee is not satisfied with the reassurance that the Bill will safeguard the position, the TRC requests the Committee along with their MLA colleagues to present a Petition of Concern to prevent passage of any legislation which will in this regard, destroy parity of treatment with the Catholic Church by removing statutory protection of a Christian ethos from the sector of schools educating children mainly from the Protestant community.

In conclusion, the TRC seeks support from MLAs to block any legislation which the Government cannot confirm will protect the Christian ethos of both Protestant and Catholic traditions.