

GENERAL SYNOD 2018

Board of Education Report Proposer: Mrs Helen McClenaghan

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Your Grace and Members of Synod,

I ask Synod to receive the Report of the Board of Education. In accordance with the practice of alternating reports from the two jurisdictions this year the initial focus will be on the Northern Ireland report. For this purpose, please have regard to pages 273-276 and particularly to the Summary on page 274, points 1, 4 and 5 of which I wish to highlight. First, the positive. The long-held ambition of controlled schools to have an advocacy body comparable to those for other school sectors has been realised with the establishment of the Controlled Schools Support Council.

The sterling work on behalf of schools already achieved justifies the faith placed in it by schools and the Churches. Dr Hamill, Secretary to the board, and a CSSC member, is an invaluable conduit of information between the board and the council. No time for complacency; we must be vigilant that the Department of Education does not trim the resources allocated to CSSC as a cost cutting measure.

More, on a positive note. Our Church enjoys strong, knowledgeable and committed representation on the Education Authority in the membership, as a transferor representative, of the Revd Amanda Adams who brings to debate at the Board of Education clear-sighted assessment of the Education Authority's delivery of educational services and the wider educational environment.

We are also privileged in the high quality of the leaders of our schools, principals and governors, the latter in a voluntary capacity, so it is timely that our Church, drawing on Dr Hamill's energy, has produced a video to encourage current governors and promote efforts to recruit successors to the current governor cadre as need arises. You will see this video shortly.

Continuing on a positive note, in respect of the functioning and effectiveness of the board itself, three members (with Dr Hamill acting as Secretary) are pursuing a remit from the

board to propose how it can be reinvigorated (see p. 276, point 5). Early principles approved by the board are being developed. One ambition is to bring coherence to the educational objectives of parishes, diocesan boards of education and the board itself.

Such scrutiny requires all the partners to want to work in complementary ways to make a measurable difference to educational and developmental opportunities for children and young people in local areas where the parish is most immediate. That, in turn, means your involvement whether clergy or laity. Think of what you can do at parish level to offer pastoral support to teachers as they face so many and varied challenges. Could the teaching of RE and the conduct of the Act of Collective Worship be sustained or enriched if parishioners' faith, life experiences and creative talents were made available to the schools?

Now to face a reality which is not positive. You, your parish, all who represent our Church on educational bodies, can play a significant role in ameliorating the worst consequences in the disabling environment of financial stringency now affecting individual schools.

Please think long and hard about the statements on p. 274, point 1. Under Local Management of Schools, the governors are permitted to spend only when they have an approved budget. Some weeks into the 2018-2019 financial year almost 50% of schools did not have approved budgets because the governors had concluded they could not deliver education to meet the needs of their pupils within the amounts allocated. Consequently the Education Authority would not approve their spending proposals because they exceeded their budgets.

As an illustration of changed circumstances, eight years ago in an educational authority area with which I was familiar only 1% of 200 school budgets were unapproved while detailed negotiations were pursued.

Wringing of hands is pointless. We need to call for decision-making: from the Department of Education, strategic over-time assured resources availability for schools; from the Education Authority, for the individual school financial guidance which is accessible and consistent; from politicians, access to them as advocates for education; and, from the individual citizen, an appreciation of immediate and long-term consequences of financial cutbacks for schools and their pupils comparable to the appreciation of the impact of reductions in the NHS which can appear more newsworthy than education.

I hope you conclude from your reading of this report that the Board of Education (Northern Ireland) is alert to both threats and opportunities affecting the children and young people in our community.

Members of Synod, I ask you to receive the report of the Board of Education.