

## **BOARD OF EDUCATION NI - GENERAL SYNOD REPORT 2024**

### **Aims**

The current aims of the Board of Education NI are, to:

- Develop, in conjunction with other churches, a clear and shared vision of education shaped by core values of the Christian faith.
- Advise the Synod of developments in educational policy in NI and represent the Church as an educational partner to the Department of Education and other educational bodies.
- Liaise with other churches within the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) in promoting the interests and safeguarding the rights of transferors.
- Facilitate the nomination of transferor governors to controlled primary and post-primary schools.
- Make submissions to relevant government departmental consultations.
- Engage with the Education Authority, the Controlled Schools Support Council and other sectoral bodies.
- Engage with Institutions of Higher Education regarding the future preparation of teachers for the Controlled sector.
- Seek, in conjunction with other churches, continued curriculum support of the RE core syllabus in schools.

### **Report**

#### **1. Current Issues**

The Board of Education (NI) is concerned by the voices in the media, politics and society which might question the role of faith in education. The Board believes that a school is best served by a non-denominational Christian ethos open to those of all faiths and non.

The Board of Education (NI) support the TRC in their pursuit of a revision to the Religious Education curriculum in Northern Ireland. The Board of Education (NI) endorse the position that Collective Worship is a Christian act and is vital in the retention of a Christian ethos in all Controlled and Church of Ireland schools.

The Board of Education (NI) is concerned with the direction of travel of an imposed part of the Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum concerning abortion and sexual reproduction for all schools in Northern Ireland.

The Board of Education (NI) welcomes the appointment of a new Minister of Education. The Board supports a proper funding solution for all schools including appropriate salaries for all teaching and ancillary staff.

The Board of Education (NI) is actively supporting the reconstitution of the boards of governors and encourage all those who appoint governors to do so prayerfully and with wisdom.

#### **2. Education Authority (EA)**

The Rev Canon Amanda Adams and Miss Frances Boyd have served as representatives on the Board of the Education Authority (EA), Canon Adams since its formation in 2015 and Miss Boyd since April 2020. Miss Boyd's term will be completed in April 2024 and Canon Adams will conclude in April 2025 at the latest. The direct involvement of the Church of Ireland in the work of the Education Authority is a practical expression of the church's concern for the moral, social, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and mental development of the next generation.

Established under the Education Act (NI) in 2014, the EA is a non- departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Education (DE), and as such is responsible to DE for ensuring that efficient and effective primary and secondary education services are available to meet the needs of children and young people. It is the employing authority for all staff in Controlled Schools and for non-teaching staff in Catholic Maintained Schools and is the funding authority for Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools. Since its inception, EA also has statutory duties relating to the facilitation and promotion of Irish Medium Education, Shared Education and the Community Use of Schools. EA also provides and delivers Youth Services in Northern Ireland, both directly and indirectly through its support of the voluntary sector.

Since 2022 the EA has engaged with two major reviews, namely the Landscape Review of the EA and the wider Independent Review of Education. Since the publication of the Landscape Review, the EA has been constructively engaging with DE to develop a high-level action plan to progress the recommendations that are specific to EA, as well as wider systems recommendations. As part of this work, EA has been working in partnership with DE to progress two “end to end” reviews, focusing on School Improvement and Special Educational Needs. The Independent Review of Education did not publish its report until December 2023 and DE is currently considering its recommendations.

Recent reviews have acknowledged that, since its establishment in 2015, the EA, encouraged by its Board, has been on a continual path of transformation. Significant progress has been made, despite challenging circumstances. The EA Board has reviewed its governance structures and procedures to enhance its effectiveness in scrutinising proposals and holding EA officers to account, thus ensuring that the interests of children and young people are best served. As staff are at the heart of excellence when it comes to education and youth services, Staff Development and Support have been priorities and are reflected in a range of professional learning programmes as well as health and well-being initiatives. Listening to and engaging with staff is also seen as crucial to transformed services. Engagement forums are now well established and have been strengthened by the newly formed NI School Leadership Forum. It is unfortunate that on-going industrial action has reduced the participation in and therefore the effectiveness of staff engagement, but it is hoped that 2024 will see a resolution to long standing pay and grading issues for teaching and non-teaching staff.

Transformation, increased cost effectiveness, and efficiency are also underpinned by improved services. The Education Information Solutions (EdiS) Programme launched in 2021, is the largest such programme in Europe. A ten-year programme, it will, when fully implemented, support a dynamic educational environment and delivery of digital services. Significant progress has been made during the year allowing parents easier access to services as well as improved access for schools to HR, payroll, and other administrative functions. All of these have yielded high levels of user satisfaction.

Unfortunately, the EA continues to face huge financial pressures. EA began the 2022/23 financial year with an underlying, recurrent opening deficit which had built up over the preceding years from unfunded, inescapable demand pressures and unfunded pay and price inflation. The funding gap increased during 2023 and EA faced demands to further reduce expenditure by more than £200 million. There is no question that such a reduction will negatively impact every child in Northern Ireland with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable and those from socially deprived areas. It was against this background that EA has had to make provision for increasing numbers of children with special educational needs. EA staff and schools are to be commended on how they have worked collaboratively and with innovation to meet the needs of children in these circumstances. The EA Board also faced very difficult and challenging decisions and will continue to do so unless and until education in Northern Ireland is properly funded.

During the coming year the EA will proceed with the reconstitution of Boards of Governors in all schools. The importance of having all Transferor posts filled in Controlled Schools cannot be

overestimated as this will ensure that the church can continue to work for the benefit of children and young people in local communities to help them to discover and fulfil their God given potential.

The Board wishes to thank Miss Boyd and Canon Adams for their steadfast and wise work as members of the EA Board.

### **3. Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)**

TRC has held meetings with a range of key stakeholders in the education sector including the Minister of Education, Education Authority, Stranmillis College, Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC), Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Catholic Trustees Support Service, and Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. The TRC has also engaged with local political parties to ensure they keep education at the forefront of their policies.

The TRC continues its role at all levels of Area Planning including: the Department of Education Area Planning Strategic Group (APSG); the Area Planning Working Group (APWG); and the Area Planning Local Groups (APLG). Dr Hamill is the TRC representative on APSG and APWG and Mr Ray Gilbert is the TRC representative on the Southwest and North APLGs which includes the Church of Ireland schools.

The TRC has been working with representatives from the Catholic Church to agree the conditions required for creating Jointly Managed Church Schools. The working group have agreed on an ethos document, a guide to creating such a school and minimum conditions for consideration of such a school. They are currently working on a joint Scheme of Management document and look forward to a real project to work on.

The TRC will be supporting all church nominators of Transferor Governors through the current process of reconstitution. The TRC would encourage all clergy and nominators to ensure that all Transferor Governors positions are filled with the best persons to serve our children and the schools they attend.

The TRC is chaired by Dr Andrew Brown (Presbyterian representative) and the four Church of Ireland representatives are Bishop Andrew Forster, Rev Amanda Adams (Vice-Chair), Rev Catherine Simpson, and Dr Peter Hamill.

### **4. Controlled School Support Council**

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is the advocacy body for Northern Ireland's controlled schools. Established in September 2016, it is gone from strength to strength and more than 95% of controlled Schools are members.

Dr Hamill is the Church of Ireland TRC representative on the CSSC Board. CSSC continues to raise the profile of the Controlled Sector and the Board of Education (NI) is delighted the impact CSSC makes on schools and wider education issues. CSSC supports schools facing changes and comments directly on the individual development proposals published by the Education Authority.

### **5. Church of Ireland Schools**

The Board of Education NI has been active in the support of Seagoe Primary School in Portadown and The Drelincourt School in Armagh. The Board is working closely with the governors of The Drelincourt to look at their way forward for the future.

### **6. Membership**

The Board was deeply saddened by the passing of Mrs Sue Hogg, who had been an active member of the Board for a number of years.

The Board has welcomed Miss Irene Knox from Clogher Diocese.

The Board wishes to thank Dr Peter Hamill for his ongoing service and commitment to the Board.

**BOARD OF EDUCATION (NORTHERN IRELAND)**

Members:

Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev FJ McDowell (Chair)

Bishop of Derry, Rt Rev A Forster

Rev M Kingston (Clerical Hon Sec)

Mr K Gibson (Lay Hon Sec)

***Elected members:***

ARMAGH Rev M Kingston

Mr T Flannagan

CLOGHER Rev Paul Thompson (Board of Education only)

Miss Irene Knox

CONNOR Rev A Campbell (Board of Education only)

Mr Ray Gilbert

DERRY Vacant

Mrs A Reid

DOWN Rev C Simpson

Vacant

**Co-opted members:**

Rev A Adams

Mrs R Forde

Mr M Johnston

Rev M Ferry

Miss F Boyd

Mrs E Trew

Dr Noel Purdy

Mr I Bell

Mr Robin McLoughlin

Mrs Diane Cheshire

**CIYD representative:**

Mr S Henry

***Honorary Secretary, Board of Education (Northern Ireland)***

Vacant

***Honorary Treasurer, Board of Education (Northern Ireland)***

Mr M Johnston

***Secretary, Board of Education (Northern Ireland)***

Dr PJ Hamill, Church of Ireland House, 61-67 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2QH

## REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD BOARD OF EDUCATION RI TO GENERAL SYNOD 2024

### Summary:

1. Personalia
2. New Boards of Management (Primary)
3. Training for Boards of Management (Primary)
4. Education Policy Developments with Department of Education
5. National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCA)
6. Religious Education Curriculum – ‘Follow Me’ Development
7. Church of Ireland Primary Management Association (CIPSMA)
8. Church of Ireland Centre, DCU
9. Ukrainian Students in Church of Ireland Schools – Update
10. Report on Advisory Services to Schools
11. Redeployment of Teachers Report
12. Communications
13. Small Schools ‘Cluster’ Project Report
14. Special Needs – Report on the introduction of a new Special Education Teacher Allocation Model.
15. Child Protection Policy Developments (Children First)
16. Report on the SEC
17. Anglican Communion Schools Network Report

### 1. Personalia

Steve Grasham – Mr Steve Grasham resigned as the RI CIYD officer in December 2023 and, therefore as a member of the Board, to begin a new role as a Church Evangelist in England. The Board wishes Steve every success and blessing in his new role.

Margaret Larminie – the Board was saddened to learn of the death of Ms Margaret Larminie, former Secretary of the General Synod Board of Education in August 2023. Bishop Michael Burrows attended the memorial service for Ms Larminie and offered condolences on behalf of the Boards of Education and the Church.

The Board were saddened to learn of the death of Mr Martin Hanevy, retired Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education in April 2023. During his time as Assistant Secretary, Mr Hanevy took a close interest in the provision of education for the Protestant community, which included engagement on the SEC, the patronage of Ashton Comprehensive and facilitating some second level schools entering the ‘free scheme’. The Board wishes to express its sympathy to the Hanevy family and to Mr Hanevys’ former colleagues at the Department of Education.

Ms Deirdre Shanley, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, with responsibility for School Governance, a section of the Department with which the Board maintains a close relationship as an Education Partner, moved to a new role at the Department of Social Protection. The Board wishes Ms Shanley every success in her new role.

At the January 2023 meeting, the Board elected the Rt Rev Michael Burrows as the vice-chairman of the Board, in accordance with Chapter 19 of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland.

### 2. Boards of Management (primary)

The new four-year term of office for primary level Boards of Management commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 (2023 – 2027). A ‘Step by Step’ Guide to the Election of Boards of Management was issued to all schools on behalf of the Board to assist with the elections process.

The Board wishes to thank all who have served on a primary school Board of Management over the previous four-year term and thanks all those who are continuing as board members or have joined their Board of Management for the first time. The management of primary and second level schools depends on volunteers giving freely of their time and expertise. The Board and school patrons continue to be grateful to all who serve on boards of Management. The Board wishes also to take this opportunity to

recognize the important role the chairperson of a Board of Management holds in the life of a school and to thank those who serve as chairpersons of Boards of Management.

### **3. Training for Boards of Management.**

As currently organized, general training modules are produced by the Department of Education to be delivered to school Boards of Management. While the modules are produced by the Department and funding for their delivery is provided by the Department of Education, the training is organized and provided by and on behalf of the school patron with the aim of the available modules being delivered over the four-year term of the Boards of Management. Participation in training is entirely voluntary for Board of Management members.

The modules of training currently provided by the Department of Education are:

1. The Board as a Corporate Entity
2. School Finances and Financial Compliance
3. Child Protection Procedures
4. Health and Safety
5. Staff Recruitment and Appointments
6. Legal Issues – compliance and regulation
7. Data Protection and GDPR compliance

Some school Patrons provide an additional module on Ethos and Faith Development in a school context. The roll-out of training for Boards of Management is done on a diocesan basis and commenced in January 2024. The intention is to deliver all of the available modules in each diocese during the term of office of the Boards of Management. Modules will also be available to view online in due course.

In previous years, the Department of Education training modules were augmented by conferences and events organized by the CIPSMA (who also provided funding for the Department of Education modules to be recorded and made available online).

Schools also have the option of participating in the various webinars produced by some of the education law expert law firms. Bodies such as the NCSE and NCCA also provide online webinars on various topics which can be accessed by Board members.

A new education service called ‘OIDE’ was launched by the Department of Education in September 2023. Oide combines a range of education system support services into one entity and is aimed at teachers and principals.

### **4. Education Policy Development with the Department of Education**

As part of its obligations as a state funded Education Partner, the Board engages in education policy development on a range of topics. This engagement can range from direct discussions and negotiations by the secretariat with the Department of Education, on behalf of the Board; to the Board itself giving close consideration to a particular policy and approving it for implementation across the education system. The Board also has representation at the Primary Education Forum (represented by the Secretary and Ms Sarah Richards, Board member), which is a deliberative forum on the specifics of ‘Forbairt’, the strategic plan of the Department of Education.

Engagement with the Department of Education included the following consultations:

- Consultations on Policy on Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making.
- Consultation on Irish Medium Education
- Consultation on a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance
- Consultation Process on Review of the EPSEN Act
- Consultation on Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy
- Consultation on the revised SET Allocation Model
- Consultation on the revisions of the Guidelines on Developing a Code of Behaviour in Schools.

The following policies and issues were considered by the Board:

- Anti-Bullying Procedures for Schools
- Child Protection Procedures for Boarding Schools
- Teacher Union Conferences Deliberations

- Governance Manual Review
- Review of Teacher and Parental Grievance Procedures
- Teacher Supply Issue
- ICT Grant non-payment

In addition to the above engagement on education policy matters, the Board made formal written submissions to the Department of Education on the following issues (which are available to view on [www.ireland.anglican.org/education](http://www.ireland.anglican.org/education)):

- Submission on School Book Scheme
- Submission on Life Long Learning
- Submission on Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy

### **5. NCCA Developments involving the Board**

The new primary curriculum was launched in 2023. The Board contributed to the development of the curriculum through numerous consultation inputs over the many years of consultation prior to the launching of the new curriculum.

The new primary mathematics curriculum was also launched in 2023 and is currently being rolled out in schools.

At second level, the NCCA is reviewing the Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum. Consultations on that review were undertaken throughout 2023 and it is understood that recommendations will go to the Minister for Education in 2024. It is understood that consultations will open on a revision of the RSE/SPHE curriculum at primary level in 2024. The Board will engage in those submissions. The NCCA has given assurances that any revisions will be child-centred and age appropriate.

### **6. RE Curriculum Development**

The Board was grateful to Dr Jacqui Wilkinson for presenting to the Board on research conducted for her PhD (awarded by the University of Leicester in 2022) on the topic of “The ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school: the student voice”. Dr Wilkinson joins the Rev Professor Canon Anne Lodge, Ms Carolyn Good and the Secretary to form the RE Curriculum Development Group. The Group met a number of times in 2023 to assess the ‘Follow Me’ RE curriculum and to determine how the curriculum might be represented and delivered in the future. The work of the Development Group is ongoing and it will continue to report back to the Board on its deliberations in 2024.

### **7. CIPSMA**

The Church of Ireland Primary School Management Association (CIPSMA) is the network for Boards of Management of primary schools under Church of Ireland patronage. The CIPSMA has provided support for various conferences and seminars for Board members in Church of Ireland primary for over a decade and previously published the Handbook for Church of Ireland primary school Boards of Management. The CIPSMA was particularly strong in advocating for the inclusion of various provisions in the Admissions to School Act 2018 and were successful in persuading the Minister for Education in including a specific provision in the draft Bill to permit the prioritization of children from Protestant faith background in school admissions (a provision which Roman Catholic schools no longer enjoy). More recently, the CIPSMA has provided funding for a number of board training modules to be produced for online viewing, which was of particular importance during the covid-19 pandemic. The Board notes that CIPSMA intends to convene an EGM in 2024. The Board hopes that the members of CIPSMA will look with confidence towards the future of the Association and continue their important work in support of Church of Ireland primary schools.

### **8. Church of Ireland Centre, DCU**

The core work of the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU is concerned with the Bachelor of Education programme. The Centre delivers key components on the B.Ed to the Centre’s students including the teaching of the RE Certificate in Teaching the *Follow Me* programme, delivering Religions, Ethics, Morals & Values modules, the Small Schools specialism and additional supports in Irish. Students on the CIC

B.Ed pathway undertake the majority of their placements in schools under Church of Ireland and other reformed Christian patronage. The Centre also supports programmes for post-primary religion teachers and chaplains.

24 teachers completed the RE Cert course (Follow Me) with Dr Jacqui Wilkinson in 2023. The course was a combination of afternoon/evening online sessions and attendance at three webinars. The course is again planned to run in 2024. Three webinars for schools were also held in 2023 on the themes of Storytelling in RE, Easter resources and Outdoor Learning in RE. A schools' project asked schools to visit their church and photograph their favourite spot. A video was created of the photographs and three schools received gifts of books. Webinars are also planned for 2024 on the themes of RE and the new primary curriculum framework, using fiction to teach about world religions and supporting schools during times of bereavement. A resource was created and sent to all schools for Advent 2023 using the Mexican Posada tradition and a Lenten prayer resource is being planned for 2024.

The Director of the Centre reviews all applicants for the Centre's B.Ed pathway to check eligibility for entry in line with the requirements of the derogation to the Employment Equality Act. The Centre produces information for post-primary schools and deals with many enquiries about the pathway. In September 2023, a new cohort of 1<sup>st</sup> year students commenced the B.Ed programme with the Centre. These students come from all around the Republic of Ireland. The Church of Ireland Centre, DCU, liaises with primary schools under Church of Ireland and other reformed Christian patronage through school placement for its students, as well as the provision of supports, participation in research and sharing of a biannual Newsletter.

The Centre held a number of events during 2023 including two conferences. The *Making Connections Conference* for principals / Boards of Management and others associated with Church of Ireland primary schools was held in DCU All Hallows' on Saturday 7 October. Keynote speakers were Dr Jacqui Wilkinson who presented on her completed doctoral research exploring school ethos and the voice of the child in Church of Ireland primary schools, and Ms Jacinta Regan from the NCCA who presented on ongoing work on SPHE and RSE in the Irish primary curriculum. The morning concluded with a panel of principals presenting on innovations in their schools and communities and a BEd4 student presenting on the Lighten our Darkness by Numbers initiative. *But that's a Whole Other Story* conference told the foundation and current stories of the five Protestant comprehensives marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of four of them. Keynote speakers were Dr Peter Murray, Prof Jim Gleeson, Dr Ken Fennelly, Rev Prof Anne Lodge and Prof Annette Scheunpflug. Detailed reports on both conferences can be found on the Dublin and Glendalough diocesan website and the Church of Ireland website.

## **9. Ukrainian Students**

In the 2023 Report to General Synod, it was reported that schools had welcomed significant numbers of children from Ukraine as a result of the war in Ukraine. This continued to be the case through the year and statistics provided to the Board by the Department of Education indicate that in 2023 (circa) 100,000 people arrived in Ireland from Ukraine and in the region of 17,500 Ukrainian students were accommodated within the Irish education system. Church of Ireland schools, at both primary and second level, have continued to play a significant role in the response to the Ukrainian way by welcoming children from Ukraine into their schools.

## **10. Advisory Service to Schools**

A central part of the role of the secretary and education advisor is to provide advice and guidance to primary schools under the patronage of the Church of Ireland. Through a long-standing arrangement, this advisory service is also provided to schools under the patronage of the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Society of Friends (Quaker). In the 2023 school year, over 1,500 enquiries from schools were replied to by phone or email. Advice to school patrons also accounted for a significant level of the advice provided; as did liaison with the Department of Education on a variety of issues on behalf of schools and patrons. Through a partnership agreement with CPSMA, schools now have access to the advisory



services of the CPSMA in addition to those provided by the education staff in Church House. This new development has been greatly welcomed by schools and marks a significant enhancement of support and resources for school principals and the chairpersons of Boards of Management. It should be noted however, that the provision of this advisory service limits the amount of time available for Church House staff to initiate and develop other projects which may be of benefit to the wider church and also limits the scope for advocacy and other forms of political and social engagement.

### **11. Redeployment Panels and Teacher Redeployment**

The Board of Education RI office operates the panels for redeployment of teachers on behalf of Church of Ireland patrons. In 2023, eighteen teachers were redeployed from one Church of Ireland primary school to another where the numbers of children in the first school were insufficient to retain the allocation of a teacher. In those circumstances, the teacher is redeployed to a school which has a vacancy arising due to the numbers of teachers rising or from a resignation or retirement of a teacher. When all teachers are redeployed and the redeployment panels are cleared, schools can then advertise their vacancies. This ‘centralized’ facility is provided to assist Church of Ireland bishops (Roman Catholic bishops manage and maintain their own panels in each of their respective dioceses).

### **12. Communications**

The Board of Education RI office has begun reissuing Education Newsbrief to schools in the 2023 school year. The intention is to issue the Newsbrief in September, Christmas, Easter and End of Year (June) and otherwise as required. Published editions of Education Newsbrief will also be made available online for ease of reference and wider circulation. It is hoped that Education Newsbrief will become a valued resource for principals and Boards of Management.

The Board wishes to thank Ms Rachael Murphy, Children and Families Board Officer, for her assistance in producing Education Newsbrief.

### **13. Small Schools Cluster Initiative.**

The Small Schools Project is made up of six clusters throughout Ireland, each with a cluster coordinator nominated by a partner body. Clusters are located in Donegal, East Galway, Connemara, Kerry Gaeltacht, West Waterford and Wicklow. Each cluster has a set of unique circumstances, which has enabled them to approach the project from a particular angle. The Donegal Cluster is comprised of four primary schools under Church of Ireland/Protestant patronage and are located between Killygordon and Dunfanaghy spanning a range of 50km. The four schools in the cluster have DEIS status. The main focus for the Donegal Cluster is that of Wellbeing of the School Community. In this, the cluster is looking at the wellbeing of pupils, staff, and the principals themselves. The cluster is working collaboratively on many levels to ensure that the goal of looking after the wellbeing of all is central to the project. Pedagogical activities for students, collaboration and joint professional learning opportunities for teachers and school staff to share best practice as well as principal coaching, curricular and administrative sharing of ideas all make this a very dynamic cluster. The cluster has established a shared drive where good practice is shared. The cluster has developed a great dynamic among the four schools and are finding the support of one and other invaluable. The vision is to continue to grow this support not only among the principals themselves but among all members of the school community through joint initiatives, professional learning opportunities and collaborative pedagogical events. The Donegal cluster initiative is financially supported by the Irish Primary Principals Network and we wish to record our thanks to the IPPN for their generous support of this project.

### **14. Special needs – New SET model**

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has announced a review of the Special Education Teacher (SET) allocation model for schools. The Board gave close consideration to the proposed revisions and was provided with the draft Guidelines to schools by the NCSE for review and comment prior to them being issued to schools. The revised allocation model will continue to involve an assessment of need based on data from the school on three variables: school enrolment; literacy/numeracy levels and socio-economic data. The NCSE has given an assurance that it is not the intention to disadvantage any school with the

revised model and that an appeals provision will also be provided. A circular on the details of the operation of the revised model was issued by the Department to all schools (primary and post primary) in January 2024.

### **15. Child Protection Policy change and development**

The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools were revised in 2023. Dr Howard Welch, principal of the Royal and Prior Comprehensive School, Donegal, represented the Board on the policy development group which revised the procedures. Schools were advised of the new requirements under the revised procedures in September 2023. While a many of the required changes related to operational matters, a number were significant and included new procedures regarding Boarding school facilities. The Board welcomed the revision of the procedures as a further ensuring that the school environment is safe for all pupils and students.

### **16. SEC**

The Secondary Education Committee was originally established by a resolution of the General Synod in to negotiate with the State on the specifics of the introduction of the ‘Free Education Scheme’. These negotiations resulted in the establishment of the SEC as an entity to distribute the ‘Protestant block grant’, under the chairmanship of Bishop Gordon Perdue, late bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. The agreement was, and continues to be, that the grant is paid to parents of children of a Protestant faith to ensure that they received subsidized access to education on an equality basis to those who had access to ‘free’ education. While a number of Protestant secondary schools subsequently entered the free education scheme and no longer charged tuition fees, the SEC grant continues to provide support and access for Protestant children to attend a school of their own ethos. The funding which parents receive (which is transferred directly to the school) is provided from capitation funding which schools in the ‘free scheme’ receive directly from the Department of Education. Through this arrangement, the Protestant secondary schools which are comprehended by the SEC are in receipt of capitation funding and should be viewed as part of an arrangement which makes them analogous to a free scheme school. However, this point continues to be contended by the Department of Education (who designed the scheme originally).

The Annual Report of the SEC is available to view at [www.secgrant.ie](http://www.secgrant.ie). The SEC is a charity and a company (Clg), fully funded by the Department of Education, accountable to the Department of Education and the Oireachtas. Mrs Hazel Corrigan, Honorary Secretary of the General Synod, chairs the Board of Directors of the SEC and Dr Ken Fennelly, is the company secretary. Information regarding applications is available at [www.secgrant.ie](http://www.secgrant.ie) and members of General Synod are asked to encourage parents with a child at primary level to apply for the grant. The SEC also asks clergy and those who are chairpersons of primary Boards of Management, to please publicise the availability of the SEC grant in your school and parish.

### **17. Establishment of the Anglican Communion Schools Network**

Within the 44 member churches that constitute the Anglican Communion, there are a number of official networks on specific areas which bring together Anglicans from around the world to plan and work together on areas of common concern in a diverse range of subjects, including church planting, environment, women, canon law and health and community.

The Anglican Consultative Council has established a new education body for the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion Schools Network is chaired by the Archbishop of Perth, Australia, the Most Rev Kay Goldsworthy and is regarded as an important new development for the Anglican Communion as an outworking of one of the Five Marks of Mission of the Church across the Anglican Communion. The Secretary was appointed as the representative of the Church of Ireland on the Anglican Communion Schools Network by the Archbishop of Armagh, following a request from the office of the Anglican Communion. Further information about the ACSN is available at: <https://www.anglicanschoolsaustralia.edu.au/>.