

Board of Education Report

Proposer: Canon Malcolm Kingston

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During the past year, the Board of Education for Northern Ireland has continued to work on its key functions namely:

- working with other Churches to develop a clear and shared vision of education shaped by core values of the Christian faith
- advising Synod of developments in education policy in Northern Ireland
- representing the Church in work with the Department of Education and other education bodies
- liaising with other Churches within the Transferors Representatives' Council
- supporting the Religious Education core syllabus in schools

This report aims to provide an overview of the activity of the Board of Education for Northern Ireland, in seeking to achieve its core objectives during the year past and will cover the following areas:

- Promoting the role of Christian faith in education
- Pursuing a revision of the Religious Education curriculum
- The work of the Education Authority
- The work of the Transferor Representatives' Council
- Church of Ireland schools

Faith in education

The Board 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 none.

The Board has also been considering the findings of the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland which was published in December 2023 and how it relates to the role of Churches in education.

Religious Education Curriculum

The Board of Education supports the Transferor Representatives' Council in their pursuit of a revision to the Religious Education Curriculum in Northern Ireland. The Board endorses the

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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.

Relationships and Sexuality Education

The Board is concerned with the direction of travel of an imposed part of the Relationship and Sexuality Education curriculum concerning abortion and sexual reproduction for all school in Northern Ireland. The high level of parental response to the Department of Education consultation supporting the role of individual schools and their ethos in determining RSE delivery is noted and welcomed. The Board has welcomed the advice published by the Department of Education on this matter.

Education Authority

The Board extends its thanks to Rev Canon Amanda Adams and Miss Frances Boyd for their dedication in representing our church as members of the Education Authority Board. Miss Boyd completed her period of service in April this year and Canon Adams continues to serve until April 2025.

The direct involvement of representation of the Church of Ireland in the work of the Education Authority is very important as this body is responsible for the delivery of efficient education services to meet the needs of children and young people through schools and youth services.

An independent review of the work of the Education Authority was published in June 2022 and our church representatives have been involved in the shaping and delivery of the action plan to address the issues and recommendations highlighted in the findings of the review. These include:

- Internal and external reviews examining the key purpose of EA, its key services and provision.
- The strategic alignment of budget to the identified priorities of the organisation
- The structure of the organisation
- Accountability and governance
- Ensuring that business practice aligns with the needs of stakeholders and customers.

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Funding

The Board is deeply concerned that our education system is under-funded. They are particularly concerned with the impact on children and wish to thank all teachers, staff and governors for working in such difficult circumstances.

Special Educational Needs

The Board has been working with both the Department of Education and the Education Authority on the exponential growth in the number of children and young people presenting with Special Educational Needs which has created a major challenge in terms of suitable school placements and the consequent resourcing in financial and human terms.

Transferor Representatives' Council

The TRC has continued to meet with a range of key partners in the education sector and political parties to discuss key educational policy issues.

TRC has also been heavily involved at both strategic and operational levels in Area Planning of education provision across Northern Ireland. The focus of this work in the past year has been the ongoing delivery of actions contained within the current Area Plan and the development of the strategic and operational aspects of the next Area Plan which will cover the next three-year period.

TRC has been working with representatives of the Catholic Church to agree the conditions required for the creation of schools jointly managed by Protestant and Catholic Churches. The Working Group have agreed an ethos document, a guide to creating such a school and the minimum conditions for such a school. They are currently working on a joint Scheme of Management.

As the process of re-constitution of school Boards of Governors is now live, TRC are supporting church nominators of Transferor Governors through the process. It is important that all Transferor Governor positions are filled, and they recently held three seminars for clergy and lay people to support the nomination. It is vitally important that churches play their role in supporting the governance of schools.

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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 as a member nominated by Clogher Diocese.

Queen's Lecture

The Board would like to invite you to attend the Annual Church of Ireland Education Lecture at Queen's University on Monday, 27th May, at 6pm in the Great Hall. Professor Stephen Williams will be exploring how AI is impacting our lives and our religious beliefs.

Thanks

The Board would like to place on record its thanks to all members for their commitment to its work and to Dr Peter Hamill who not only supports the ongoing work of the Board but also works on our behalf with the Transferor Representatives' Council and the Controlled Schools' Support Council.