

Minister Draft for approval please. See also similar letter on attached folder from Mr. Kilfedder
Reference..... *JN* *13* *57*

Mr Martin:

J. J. O'Brien
Def. advised Q/c
Keenan
25/6

cc Mr Clark
Mr Hawthorne

CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS AND ABSENCES OF TEACHERS - HUNGER STRIKERS' FUNERALS

1. I think you should be aware of the correspondence on this file and that attached where both Mr McCusker and Mr Kilfedder have seen fit to forward anonymous letters about actions taken by schools and teachers on the occasions of the hunger strikers' funerals.
2. There can be little doubt that many school authorities and Principals were faced with difficult decisions in light of direct or indirect intimidation by terrorist organisations and some of those who decided to stay open are now feeling aggrieved that others closed. An attempt was made by NAHT to get us to make the decisions for schools but naturally we have refused to do so - it would be impracticable in any case; it is clear from experience over the last 12 years that the best we can do to support Principals and school authorities in difficult situations is to accept their decisions on the appropriate action to be taken.
3. I have therefore firmed up the draft reply to Mr McCusker to make it clear that the Department will support schools' decisions on closures and that the investigation he seeks would therefore be pointless.
4. Mr Kilfedder's anonymous correspondent alleges that schools are not marking teachers absent where they take a day off in protest. From the tone of the letter I doubt if the writer has any real information - he (or she) seems more concerned simply to throw a few stones at various religious and other targets. Indeed I am surprised that Mr Kilfedder bothered to send the letter further than his waste-paper basket.
5. This case is mainly a matter for Teachers Division but I would suggest that it might do no harm to send Mr Kilfedder a reply on the lines of that proposed for Mr McCusker with an additional sentence in the penultimate paragraph -

"If the information is not recorded on the school return there is no action which my Department can take; an investigation could only be undertaken if specific information about alleged abuses were provided. *It is not reasonable for Department / should add that the department does not normally take action upon information of school source is anonymous.*"

NJ

N R JENNINGS

16 June 1981

Mrs Hoan
to incorporate
amendment of 'X'
please
25/6