

Mr Smith:

~~Mr Dodds:~~

~~Mr Higgins:~~

Mr Jennings would like thoughts and/or draft replies on the attached paper by 13 November please.

Helena Ferguson

HELEN FERGUSON (Mrs)
PS/MR JENNINGS

5 November 1984

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

1. In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the law requires, subject to certain provisos (for example, the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure), that pupils be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. In fact most Roman Catholic children are educated in voluntary schools under Roman Catholic management while most Protestant children attend controlled schools under the management of Education and Library Boards or voluntary schools under the management of bodies other than the Roman Catholic Church.
2. The Government's policy (and that of successive administrations in Northern Ireland) is that integrated education should be encouraged wherever there is a local wish for it, and it will support practical proposals which it is satisfied reflect the wishes of local people, but there can be no question of forcing integration on anyone who does not want it. There is, of course, no statutory bar to children of different religions being educated together. In law, every school in Northern Ireland, whether controlled (state) or voluntary, is open to pupils of any religious affiliation and there are, in fact, some schools which are attended by pupils of different denominations.
3. The Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 (enacted by way of a Private Member's Bill sponsored by Lord Dunleath) is intended to facilitate the establishment in Northern Ireland of schools likely to be attended by pupils of different religious affiliations or cultural traditions. The Act makes provision for existing schools, with the exception of controlled nursery, grammar or special schools, to opt to become controlled integrated schools. Such schools would have a management committee composed of representatives of the Protestant Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, parents, teachers and Education and Library Boards. To date only one school, the Throne Controlled Primary School in North Belfast, has become a controlled integrated school (on 1 January 1982). It was widely recognised at the time that the request for controlled integrated status was a means of avoiding closure rather than a genuine desire for integrated education - the school had no Roman Catholic pupils or teachers. In fact the enrolment at the Throne Primary School has continued to decline to the point where the Belfast Education and Library Board has published a development proposal to close the school at the end of the 1984/85 school year. *and Mr DENE has approved this proposal*
4. One other school, Lagan College, has been founded with the aim of providing integrated education. Set up as an independent school in 1981 under the auspices

of the All Children Together movement, its object is to provide interdenominational, all-ability secondary education for boys and girls. Its initial intake was 28 and by September 1984 its enrolment has increased to some 285 pupils divided roughly equally between Protestants and Roman Catholics. It is anticipated that the eventual enrolment will be about 450. As from 1 April 1984 the College has been recognised as a grant-aided voluntary maintained secondary school which means that the salaries of teachers are paid in full by the Department, with other day-to-day running costs being met by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. In addition, the College is eligible for 85% grant from the Department on approved capital expenditure. The College is presently operating from temporary accommodation where there are planning difficulties and is seeking a permanent location.

5. In reaching its decision to bring the College into the grant-aided system, the Department recognised that it was meeting a significant parental demand for a fully integrated school, and the decision is therefore a practical example of the Government's policy on integrated education in operation.

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