

Mr Peckle - Copy for Information

Spull

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
from the Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA

Mr Patrick J Roche  
Northern Ireland Unionist Party  
Parliament Buildings  
BELFAST  
BT4 3XX

Mr McGuinness 11/01/00

*Dr Bourne*

*Mr Wright*  
*to be called M.A. R.*  
*Wife*

22 December 1999

Dear Mr Roche

You wrote to my Permanent Secretary, Nigel Hamilton, on a number of matters relating to my authority and powers as the Minister for Education. As you will know, my appointment to this position arises from the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the electorate both North and South.

First I should stress, as I have already done on several occasions since my appointment as Minister for Education, that I am totally committed to promoting the interests of all our children and ensuring they are treated in a fair and equal manner. I will do my utmost to ensure that our education service continues to improve the standards of teaching and of learning for all. While I am disappointed that you feel the need to raise the issues in your letter, I hope that the following comments will allay any concerns you may have.

As a general point, all Ministers of the Executive Committee must comply with the terms of the Ministerial Code of Conduct and I am committed to doing that. As you will know, all Ministers are answerable both to the Assembly and, ultimately, the electorate.

As for your particular concerns, let me offer the following comments.

Firstly, all my visits to schools have been in response to invitations from the Principal and the Chairman of the Board of Governors and I have no intention of deviating from this practice. I would hope that teachers, pupils and parents would respect this position and that those who harbour any concerns about the visit would, nonetheless, conduct themselves in a courteous and responsible manner.

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M3 117/6

As far as access to personal records of teachers, pupils and staff is concerned you will, of course, be aware that teachers and other staff in schools are not employed by my Department. Of course, the Department maintains certain records relating to teachers as it provides a service to the Education and Library Boards for the payment of their salaries and pensions. However, it is unlikely that I would require access to such detail.

I am sorry that you feel it necessary to register concerns at my appointment. I would hope that my contribution as Minister for Education would be judged on the basis of my achievements on behalf of all our children and young people.

Yours sincerely

Martin

Date Referred:

14/12/99

Branch:

Copied To For Input:

**MARTIN McGUINNESS MP MLA**  
**Minister for Education**

Copied To For

SECRETARY/MR PEOVER

Branch:

Branch:

GAIL JACKSON  
DE Private Office  
Ext. 59304

DE PRIVATE OFFICE ENQUIRY

(CORRESPONDENCE)

Reference: COR1169/1999 Other Ref:  
Name: MR PATRICK J ROCHE MLA  
Enquiry: CONCERNS REGARDING A SINN FEIN MINISTER OF EDUCATION

ACTION REQUIRED

Please provide advice and draft reply for signature by Minister  
TO BE WITH DENI PRIVATE OFFICE NOT LATER THAN 16/12/99

Referred To: RICHARD BUCHANAN Date Referred: 14/12/99

Branch: CEN

Copied To For Input:

Copied To For Information:  
SECRETARY/MR PEOVER

Branch:

Branch:

GAIL JACKSON  
DE Private Office  
Ext. 59304

NB If this case is transferred to another division or if you think another division should have input please inform Private Office



the new  
Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Tel: 01232 521994  
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Parliament Buildings  
Belfast BT4 3XX

7 December 1999

Mr Nigel Hamilton  
Private Secretary  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
BANGOR BT19 7PR

Dear Mr Hamilton

#### CONCERNS REGARDING A SINN FEIN MINISTER OF EDUCATION

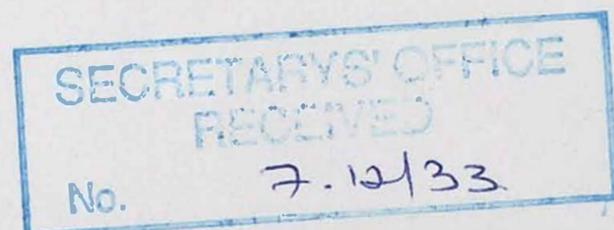
I would appreciate comment on policy on the role and responsibilities of the Minister of Education and the issues arising from that.

The query arises from the recent appointment to the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly of a member of Sinn Fein to the post of Minister of Education. Sinn Fein is inextricably linked to the Provisional IRA which has terrorised the citizens of Northern Ireland for the past three decades.

Many parents and teachers are horrified by the appointment of the alleged former 'overall commander' of the IRA in Londonderry to the post of Minister of Education responsible for the education and welfare of their children. (Reference Jack Holland - Hope Against History, page 221).

I would be grateful if you would clarify a number of points, particularly for those who are deeply shocked and upset by the recent appointment.

1. Does a Minister of Education have access to all school, college and educational facilities and are there any limits? What policy/documents deal with this?
2. Does a Minister of Education have access to all and every record regarding teachers, pupils and staff? Are there any limits, for example for security reasons and how do these operate?
3. What options are open to those parents, teachers, educational managers and pupils who would find, for example, a ministerial visit unacceptable?
4. What sanctions, if any could be used against those staff or others who may register their concerns by, for example, withdrawing from participation in a ministerial visit?



I am registering my gravest concerns at this appointment. I look forward to an early reply.

Yours sincerely

*Patrick J. Roche*

Patrick J Roche  
Northern Ireland Unionist Party  
Assembly Member for Lagan Valley