

Secondary Education Committee – Report 2006

SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REPORT 2006

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

The Rt Rev WP Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (Chairman)
The Rev Canon RJEFB Black
Mrs JM Bruton
Mrs L Clarke
Mr G Jephson
Rev Canon J Merrick
Mrs P O'Malley
Ms EE Oldham

The Presbyterian Church

Mr B Duffy
Rev CM Hunter

The Methodist Church

Rev N Fallows
Dr JW Harris (Deputy Chairman)

The Religious Society of Friends

Mr R Johnson
Professor B Murdoch

Secretary to the Committee and to the Company

Canon John E McCullagh

Administrator (Grants Scheme)

Mr D Wynne

SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Secondary Education Committee (SEC) is a body comprising representatives from the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Religious Society of Friends.

The Committee derives its authority from a resolution passed by the sponsoring churches in 1965.

The functions of the SEC are twofold. Firstly, to distribute a Block Grant provided by the Department of Education and Science (DE&S) to families, where at least one parent is a member of a reformed church and who need assistance to send their children to

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Protestant secondary schools. Secondly it also seeks to represent the interest of the member churches in the post-primary education system.

The Committee operates as a limited company thus allowing both the corporate body and the liability of individual members to be appropriately insured.

Block Grant Scheme

Enrolments (2005/06) in the twenty-one fee-charging schools totalled 9611 (9250 in previous year). This figure does not include the five comprehensive schools. In the school year 2004/05 the audited accounts showed the total, received from the Department of Education & Science, was €5,338,894 (€5,120,481), the grant in aid of fees totalled €4,983,287 (€4,736,574) and capitation adjustment grant €355,607 (€351,907). The cost of administering the SEC scheme was €16,898 (€27,985). There is a small grant to assist the running of the office but it is necessary to utilise interest from the grant received to provide a further subvention for these costs.

The following numbers of grants were awarded in respect of the 2005/06 school year: 1433 day grants (1,493), 1049 boarding grants (1,091), 2482 in total (2,584).

The Committee agreed to increase grants for the school year 2006/07 on a scale from boarding €1,140 - €4,725 (€1,140 - €4,500) day €480 - €1,800 (€480 - €1,710). An increase in certain allowances was also agreed in relation to the reckoning of assessments. This resulted in improved access to grants for a number of families.

The Administrator, Mr Wynne, again attended a number of open days at the request of schools and took the opportunity to discuss issues with individual parents. He also made contact with each school to discuss the functioning of the grant scheme. This ensures that schools have every opportunity to draw attention to the difficulties of any individual family. He also addressed the Church of Ireland Diocesan Synod at Tuam on the work of the SEC.

In recent years, there has been a delay in the payment, each term, of the block grant by the Department of Education & Science. It is understood that this results from the delay in payments to the Department itself from the Department of Finance. There is an inevitable knock-on effect with payments not being made to schools until the very end of term. This delay is regretted.

Capitation Adjustment Grant

This grant has been paid directly to schools for disbursement according to the school's discretion to support those families who are necessitous. The Committee resolved that the grant in future would be paid directly to schools based on the proportion of grant in aid of fees being paid to schools in a particular year and that the schools should continue to disperse the grant to aid those families who come within the ambit of the SEC grant scheme.

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Bursars' Conference

Sections 18 & 12 of the Education Act refer to the accounting for sums voted by the Oireachtas and for the availability of such accounts to officials of the Department of Education & Science (DE&S). The DE&S had agreed that a unit, the Financial Support Services Unit, be set up within the Secretariat for secondary schools to receive and confirm the receipt of such accounts to the Department. The Secretariat is the management body advising all voluntary secondary schools.

A conference to discuss the appropriate form of accounts and level of certification was held under the auspice of the committee. Mr Fergus Dunne of the FSSU addressed the bursars and dealt with a number of issues. A sub-committee will liaise with Mr Dunne to achieve further clarification.

The opportunity was also used to again explain the application of the capitation adjustment grant which is allocated in accordance with the proportion of pupils receiving tuition grants in each school. The grant is targeted at the children of necessitous Protestant families.

School Chaplains

There has been no further progress on this issue although schools have continued to make such appointments from their own funds. The DE&S has been reticent to support a pilot project even though the significant benefit of a chaplaincy service to adolescents is manifest. This group is beset by an increasing incidence of psychiatric illness and suicide. The role of a chaplain in relating to students and in creating an effective home school link is extraordinarily valuable.

There was a regrettable change in policy by the DE&S in relation to the appointment of a chaplain to the Royal & Prior Comprehensive. The new appointee had been appointed and was offered a permanent contract by the board of management as had been the practice in that and other comprehensive schools as the post is *ex quota*. The DE&S subsequently insisted that the appointment be on an annual (temporary) basis. This is an unfortunate development even though under the Fixed Term Workers Act the chaplain would gain a contract of indefinite duration in due course.

Summer Works Grant

A number of schools had their applications for the Summer Works Grant Scheme 2005 initially rejected on the grounds of being fee charging schools. Subsequently the Committee was delighted to learn that the decision had been reversed and that the DE&S had again acknowledged the eligibility of the voluntary secondary schools to participate in this and other building grant schemes.