

## **Admission to schools – Committee report**

*(draft remarks)*

Minister & Chairperson will know that this is an area I am very interested and involved in.

The Minister will know this in particular as we represent the same constituency and have debated the general issue of admissions, as well as issues particular to our own constituency, many times in this chamber.

We have a problem with admissions in some areas.

Where there is oversubscription for places. Massive demand for particular schools.

Which has given us a waiting list system – 11 years in some cases – that

- discriminates against people who may have recently moved to an area.
- A system which creates anxiety and stress for parents who are given a holding number and do not know if their child will ever actually get a place in the preferred school.
- And a system where often, children cannot be educated in their local community, in their local school.

Which is incredible when you think about it. Particularly at primary level.

Sometimes to educate ones child there is no other choice but going down the fee-paying route, even when it may not be affordable. Stretches parents financially.

That is unacceptable.

It is a failing on the part of the state.

We haven't yet debated the legislation but the Minister is right to be bringing in robust reforms in this area.

And it's not about centralising power in the Department of Education as to who gets to go where – far from it – it is about ensuring that the admissions system is open, transparent and fair.

That it is a system that works for parents and educators alike. Because currently it works for neither.

I suppose we will really get a chance to get stuck in to this debate when we move to the next stage, from preliminary consideration, to debating actual content and proposals.

I look forward to that.

There are many stakeholders involved. We won't be able to please all of them.

But I suppose we shouldn't try to.

Commend the chairperson on her work.

While the committee was taking submission on the draft proposals I held a public meeting on them in Donnybrook, with parents and educators, and the outcomes of that meeting fed in to that process.

And my thanks to all who participated.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason, my submission is not listed in the report in Appendix 5 so I will in a moment briefly read out some of the issues raised as per the report of that meeting.

Looking at just some of the conclusions in the report.

Conclusion 1 - Lack of diversity of school types.

Incredible that in 2014 most parents in this country don't really have a choice of school in terms of not sending their children to a religious school.

And that they may not get in to the local school because their child is not the right religion.

Minister, people scoff at you for pursuing this agenda but you must continue.

I have had parents come to me who have baptised their children simply so that they can move up the waiting lists.

Conclusion 7 – I don't agree with this conclusion, that there be no derogation for children of past pupils.

The current proposal from the Minister stands at 25%, which is modest.

Many parents will know that a lot of the work done in a school is done on a voluntary basis, by the parents, because they have a connection or association with the school from their own time there, and continue to stay involved in the school for when their children might attend.

Such dedication and volunteerism benefits everyone in the school and the community and should not be discouraged through actions by the Minister.

Conclusions 11 and 12 concern cooperation between schools in an area viz admissions - this is essential.

Coming back to the meeting I held last November, I would like to read in to the record some of the outcomes of that report under the following headings: Inclusivity and resource management, Gaelscoil, past pupils, feeder schools, foster children. [Read from meeting report].

[You can read these sections of the report by going to <http://www.eoghanmurphy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Report-Public-Meeting-on-new-School-Enrolment-Proposals-Dec-2013.pdf>].

Congratulate Minister, Chairperson and Committee.