

1693/84

March 1985

DRAFT APPROPRIATION (NI) ORDER 1985: HOUSE OF LORDS

EXPENDITURE OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND. (POSSIBLE QUESTION FROM THE LORD HAMPTON)

WHAT PROVISION IS INCLUDED IN THE ESTIMATES FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND ?

There is no specific budget for integrated education in Northern Ireland. Government funds grant-aided integrated schools in the same way as other grant-aided schools. It is estimated that capital grants of some £250,000 will issue to the Lagan College this year and annual recurrent costs (including teachers salaries) are estimated at over £300,000.

PS/Mr Scott.

Replacement Q & A. brief for next forwarded earlier today.

John L. Scott.
8/3

cc Mr. A. D. Huel

Mr D McCann

INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON
INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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.

WHY DID THE GOVERNMENT AGREE TO BRING
LAGAN COLLEGE INTO THE GRANT-AIDED SYSTEM?

In reaching its decision, the Department was satisfied that the College 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.

ARE THERE ANY OBSTACLES AT PRESENT TO
INTEGRATED EDUCATION?

Yes but none of them is of the Government's making. They are the rooted objection of many parents to having their children educated otherwise than in schools of their own religious persuasion. The fact that much of the population lives in areas of housing segregated on sectarian lines, the fact that many schools are situated inside such areas and the fact that within them children, and parents, of a different religious persuasion would feel themselves to be unsafe.

WHY HAS THE GOVERNMENT NOT TAKEN THE
OPPORTUNITY PROVIDED BY THE ASTIN
REPORT TO REDUCE CHURCH REPRESENTATION
ON SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES?

Integration cannot be imposed by Government where it is not wanted. This was made clear in the Report itself, which emphasised that commitment to the distinctive religious character of their schools is felt, not only by the Trustees of Maintained Schools but also by the great majority of parents and teachers associated with them. In short, the Report is not a vehicle to secure integration of schools, nor was it intended to be.

IS NOT THE PRESENCE OF CHURCH
REPRESENTATIVES ON SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEES THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO INTEGRATION?

It must be remembered that the association of the Churches with education in Northern Ireland is close and of long standing. I am not aware of any sizeable body of opinion in Northern Ireland which favours completely secular schools.

DOES RESEARCH NOT SHOW THAT A MAJORITY
OF CATHOLICS AND A MAJORITY OF
PROTESTANTS FAVOUR INTEGRATED EDUCATION?

There have been various opinion polls on this subject in recent years but it would be quite wrong to put too much reliance on polls on matters of this sort. The opinions that matter are those of the parents whose children have to go to the schools in question.

WHY DID THE GOVERNMENT NOT APPROVE THE
REQUEST THAT MALONE PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST,
SHOULD BECOME A CONTROLLED INTEGRATED SCHOOL?

This request was not supported by the Belfast Education and Library Board, and on the basis of the evidence available to it, the Department was not satisfied as to the future viability of the school as a

controlled integrated school, or the degree of integration which was likely to be achieved. The proposal was therefore not approved. The existing school will in fact also now close with effect from 31 August 1985.

WILL THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BE PREPARED TO APPROVE FURTHER PROPOSALS TO ESTABLISH NEW INTEGRATED SCHOOLS?

The considerations which were applied to the proposal to establish Lagan College as a grant-aided school will continue to apply to any further proposals to establish new integrated schools. The Department would have to have regard to the views of the appropriate Education and Library Board and to any other comments which might be made following publication of any proposal. In addition, the Department must also carefully consider, as it did in the case of Lagan College, whether there was sufficient local demand for any new school to ensure its continuing viability.

March 1985

DRAFT APPROPRIATION (NI) DEBATE: HOUSE OF LORDS

INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Background Note

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. The recent decision to bring Lagan College into the grant-aided system is a practical example of the Government's policy in operation. In reaching its decision the Department was satisfied that the College was meeting a significant parental demand for a fully integrated school. 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 denomination and there are, in fact, some schools which are attended by pupils of different denominations.
3. A significant factor which inhibits the development of integrated schools in Northern Ireland is, of course, the traditional pattern of segregated housing in certain areas of the province - a situation which has been considerably exacerbated by the political unrest of the last 15 years. Since schools are essentially local institutions reflecting the character of the communities which they serve, this trend in itself, represents a substantial practical obstacle to integrated education.

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4. Legislation has been in force since 1978 which facilitates the establishment in Northern Ireland of schools likely to be attended by pupils of different religious affiliations or cultural traditions. The legislation makes provision for existing schools, with the exception of controlled nursery, grammar or special schools, to opt to become controlled integrated schools, ie, schools with a management committee composed of:-

- a. representatives of the transferors and superseded managers of controlled schools in the area, ie, the Protestant Churches;
- b. representatives of the trustees of maintained schools in the area ie Roman Catholic Church;
- c. representatives of parents of children attending the school;
- d. representatives of the appropriate Education and Library Board; and
- e. from July 1985, representatives of teachers at the school.

In the case of controlled schools the request for controlled integrated status must come from not less than two-thirds of the persons appointed to the school management committee as representatives of the transferors or superseded managers, while in the case of voluntary schools the request must come from the trustees.

5. One school, the Throne Controlled Primary School in North Belfast, did 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 of the Throne continued to decline and the Department has recently approved a proposal by the Belfast Education and Library Board to close it with effect from 31 August 1985.
6. One further school, Malone Primary School in South Belfast, also applied for controlled integrated status. However this request was not supported by the Belfast Board, and on the basis of the evidence available to it, the Department was not satisfied as to the future viability of the school as a controlled integrated school, or the degree of integration which was likely to be achieved. The proposal was therefore not approved. The existing school will in fact also now close with effect from 31 August 1985.