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RATHGAEL HOUSE
BALLOO ROAD
BANGOR
CO. DOWN

20 June 1988

Dear Chairman

You will already be aware of the increased emphasis which the Government has been giving recently to the best means of improving community relations in Northern Ireland and I am sure you will have noted a number of new initiatives in pursuit of this objective.

In September last the Secretary of State announced the creation of a new Central Community Relations Unit which, amongst other functions, provides advice directly to him on how community relations are affected by major government policies. Since then I have initiated a new Cross-Community Contact Scheme to encourage schools, youth groups and other organisations to embark on new activities involving cross-community contact. You may also have seen details of the recently announced 'Spirit of Enniskillen' Bursaries which will encourage young people from our two communities to embark on travel projects to countries where divided communities have learned to live in harmony.

These new initiatives are important but they must not be seen to diminish the importance of existing work in Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) which has been going on within and between schools for many years. The Education and Library Boards have contributed to this important work as have a number of voluntary bodies such as the Community Relations in Schools Group and the Corrymeela Community. In addition, the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development, through its Education for Mutual Understanding Steering Committee, has given a valuable lead in the work, and is currently working on the preparation of a Teacher Guideline on Education for Mutual Understanding, which it is anticipated will be distributed to all schools in the autumn term of the 1988/89 school year.

The successful promotion of good community relations within and between schools depends on the willing co-operation and involvement of everyone in the education system and I hope you will agree that Boards of Governors have an important contribution to make. I have been thinking of how best to encourage Governors to focus their contribution. I think the best way to proceed would be to have one person on each Board of Governors undertake particular responsibility for the promotion of Education for Mutual Understanding and cross-community contact in their school.

What I have in mind is that this nominated governor could take a particular interest in the efforts to promote EMU within his or her school and give general support to the establishment of cross-community contacts with other schools. In short this governor would have a general remit to promote good community relations in every way possible.

I hope you will agree that to have such a focus in each Board of Governors could help to promote the school's interest and involvement in activities to promote cross community contact, and could give further encouragement to the teachers and pupils to develop activities in EMU. I think it is most important that this focus is created at individual school level because it is at this level where cross community contact can be most meaningful. On a much broader scale, you may be interested to know that a single individual has been nominated by each of the main Churches to provide a focus for EMU and to join in a regular meeting with me to exchange ideas and discuss progress. It might also be useful and stimulating if, for example, my Department arranged for nominated governors to meet together occasionally on an informal basis to exchange views and establish contacts.

I should be grateful if your Board would consider what I have suggested in this letter, and would let me have any other views about how this important aspect of education may be promoted. It would be helpful if at the same time you could let me have the name of your Board's representative so that we can issue personal copies of relevant circulars etc and to facilitate contact for any meetings or other functions which may be organised.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Brian Mawhinney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'B' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

BRIAN MAWHINNEY



① Mr Spence
② *W. H. Cusker*

NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

M. Cusker
Copy to EMU file

22 June 1988

EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Education Minister, Dr Brian Mawhinney MP, who also has responsibility for community relations, has called on school governors to help improve community understanding and tolerance in Northern Ireland.

In a personal letter to the Chairman of each School Board of Governors, Dr Mawhinney has asked each Board to consider appointing one Governor "with a particular responsibility for the promotion of Education for Mutual Understanding and cross-community contact for their school".

Highlighting the increased emphasis which the Government is placing on the need to improve community relations within the province, a drive which he is spearheading and a matter on which he is reporting directly to the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Tom King MP, Dr Mawhinney, in his letter to the Governors said: "The successful promotion of good community relations within and between schools depends on the willing co-operation and involvement of everyone in the education system and I hope you will agree that Boards of Governors have an important contribution to make."

Dr Mawhinney added: "What I have in mind is that this nominated governor could take a particular interest in the efforts to promote Education for Mutual Understanding within his or her school and give general support to the establishment of cross-community contacts with other schools. In short, this governor would have a general remit to promote good community relations in every way possible.