

AUSTRIÚ 2010
TRANSFER 2010

Statement 2-2-09

Nuair a bunaíodh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin i mí Bealtaine 2007, bhí ceist an oideachais ar cheann de na príomhcheisteanna a bhí againn. Tá an méid seo amhlaidh go fóill féin. Ba é an 11 plus a rinneadh anuraidh an ceann deiridh.

When the Executive came into being in May 2007, one of the most pressing issues facing us was the issue of education. The same is still true today. Last year's 11 plus will be the last.

I have reflected long and hard on what has been said to me over the past 16 months. Additionally I have taken detailed and considered account of the changing environment in which our educational system is actually expected to function.

The debate on education has become narrowly focused on the contentious issue of academic selection. In an ideal world the debate of the past year would have been much broader. I cannot defend a system which is built around and geared towards the needs of 40% of our children. As Minister of Education I am responsible for the education of all our children. Every year thousands of children are failed by our education system. For the most part they are already

disadvantaged. They attend the schools suffering most from the impact of falling pupil numbers.

From the outset therefore it is important to state that the process we are now involved in is a process of necessary change – it is not change simply for change sake. It is a process of change with the sole aim of building on the successes which exists in the current system while addressing the very serious inequalities and weaknesses which also undoubtedly exist.

I have always been clear that I do not believe in a ‘one size fits all’ approach. But I do strongly believe in equality and social justice. What I want to see is a system which is child centred and delivering the sort of educational outcomes we need as a society for the challenges which we will face in the years ahead.

That means building a system which will sustain a range of different types of schools and provision and which values all of them equally.

We cannot ignore the challenges presented to our system by under achievement and demographic decline. We must ensure that finite resources are used efficiently and are not wasted. It is much better to see the declining numbers as an opportunity to bring about well managed change which can deliver better outcomes for all. As I have said, as Education Minister my responsibility extends to all children and all schools. I cannot stand by and watch good quality secondary schools and their teachers bear the brunt of demographic decline. As

more and more grammar schools take in a greater percentage of children with B2s, C and D grades at 11, in pursuit of numbers and funding, the pointlessness of an academic test at 11 is underlined. The flip side of this is a corresponding reduction of pupils and teachers from the secondary sector

Tá an fócas atá agam dírithe ar an bpáiste agus ar an oideachas a sholáthraímid dóibh. Níl sé dírithe ar institiúidí a chaomhnú san fhoirm ina bhfuil siad faoi láthair díreach mar mhaithe leo féin. Lena rá i mbeagán focal, ní mór tús áite a thabhairt do riachtanais an pháiste, seachas do riachtanais nó do cheanglais institiúid ar bith. Caithfidh an institiúid freastal a dhéanamh ar an bpáiste – agus ní an bealach eile thart.

My focus is on the child and on the education we deliver for them. It is not on preserving institutions in their current form simply for the sake of it. In short the needs of the child must come before the needs or requirements of any institution. The institution must serve the child – not the other way around. I appreciate those within the grammar sector who continue to deliver a quality education for many children, and my proposals will not affect this in the slightest. Indeed they will enhance them. But a small number of schools cannot hold the vast majority, to ransom. It is simply not tenable for around 30 schools to dictate, in their own narrow interests, education policy.

Those who have sought to prevent change need to reflect upon the reality of the new political landscape we now live in. This is not the

old Stormont regime nor government by remote control from Westminster. It is local Ministers from across the community, elected by local people and accountable to them taking decisions. Nationalists, Republicans and Unionists are here on the basis of equality. I intend to act on the program of change on the basis of which I was elected. For decades British Ministers ignored the weaknesses in our education system and avoided the contentious issues. The 11+ would never have been scrapped by a British or indeed a Unionist education minister. Sinn Fein's approach is very different. We are not afraid to tackle the difficult issues. We are committed to a program of change, in education and in every other facet of our society, which delivers equality and social justice, which addresses disadvantage and tackles institutional discrimination and inequality. A program of change which will deliver for disadvantaged communities – nationalist and unionist alike. The children of the Shankill Road, for example, have been consistently failed and disadvantaged by the system of academic selection and rejection. I am not prepared to ignore that reality. Those who put forward the notion that the only way in which a quality education can be delivered is through a system of academic selection are ignoring the reality across the world. In almost every other country children achieve quality education without recourse to academic selection. The best education systems in the world are non selective systems.

Is cuid de chreatlach oideachasúil leathan í réiteach na ceiste faoi aistriú iarbhunscoile, réiteach atá bunaithe ar an gcuraclam athbhreithnithe nua a bhfuil soláthar roghanna níos fearr, deiseanna

níos fearr agus torthaí níos fearr mar aidhm aige. Tá níos mó i gceist leis seo ná an díospóireacht faoin aistriú iarbhunscoile féin a bhí mar phríomhábhar sna cheannlínte le cúpla mí anuas.

The resolution of the issue of post primary transfer is of course part of a much wider educational jigsaw based upon the new revised curriculum which is about delivering improved choice, improved opportunity and improved outcomes. In essence, this is about much more than the debate about post primary transfer which has dominated the headlines in the course of recent months.

As it stands now some young people have as few as 8 subjects to choose from at A Level. The Entitlement Framework will ensure that young people will have a choice of at least 24 courses at key Stage 4 and 27 at post-16, with a balance that ensures at least one third are academic, at least a third vocational or technical and the other third made up of an appropriate combination of the two. These are substantial changes which will deliver positive outcomes.

Schools and colleges will have to co-operate and share facilities and expertise to deliver this expanded curriculum and in March 2008 I announced plans for Area Based Planning to facilitate the construction of such a system. That work is progressing.

In December 2007 I set out in the Assembly the framework around which children would transfer to post primary level in the future. I announced that that year's 11+ would be the final exam of this type

and that in future children would transfer on the basis of a menu of criteria – community, geographical and family.

I also committed to embark on further consultations with educational stakeholders and political colleagues in the Assembly and the Executive.

As a result of that consultation I proposed a compromise which if accepted would have allowed for a phasing out of academic selection over a three year period. In May I brought these proposals to a meeting of the Executive. The DUP and UUP refused to discuss them. I offered to hold a single issue Executive meeting on the matter. Again this was rejected by the DUP. I also wrote to every Executive Minister offering them the opportunity to discuss my proposals on a one to one basis. No DUP Minister availed of that opportunity.

An tseachtain seo caite, chuir mé páipéar faoi bhráid an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin arís, agus arís eile, ní dhearnadh aon phlé air.

Tríd an bpróiseas ar fad, rinne mé iarracht teacht ar chomhaontú le comhghleacaithe ar an gCoiste Feidhmiúcháin agus mé ar lorg reachtaíochta don bhealach nua chun tosaigh.

Last week I again submitted a paper for consideration by the Executive and again it was not discussed.

Throughout I have attempted to reach a consensus with colleagues in the Executive and sought to legislate for the new way forward. However both the DUP and UUP have made their positions clear. They support a system designed in the previous century to meet the needs of a previous century. On many occasions, particularly in the Assembly, I have been disappointed by the nature of the debate. Instead of focusing on children, parents and teachers, some have sought to reduce the debate to personal abuse, insults and base politicking. I have refused to engage in this sort of nonsense. I am not prepared to allow an issue of such importance to be reduced to a contest of who can shout loudest. The issue is too important for that – and I genuinely believe that we could have had and should have had a much more constructive engagement over the past year.

Despite the consensus amongst educational stakeholders on the need for change this has not been mirrored at a political level. Indeed it is clear from the public contributions made by the DUP and UUP that they will continue to block political agreement and will prevent legislation passing through the Assembly.

But we are where we are. The time for a decision has now been reached. The 11+ is gone, forever, and I welcome and celebrate that achievement. Regulations governing transfer procedures end this year. I have exhausted all of the options for achieving agreed new ones. We now need to make decisions about Transfer 2010. I will not allow the DUP and the UUP to block the process of necessary and

well managed change. I now intend to move forward. Parents, teachers and pupils need clarity. They need certainty.

Sa pháipéar a chuir mé faoi bhráid an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin mhol mé moltaí comhréiteacha trína mbeadh trí bliana iontrálacha déthaobhacha. Dhiúltaigh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin iad a phlé agus mar sin de, níl mé sásta creatlach reachtach a iarraidh do na moltaí seo agus tá mé anois ag tarraingt siar an coimisiúnaithe a thug mo Roinn do CCEA le teist a ullmhú do phróiseas aistrithe 2010. Ní féidir le mo Roinn teist a chur ar fáil a mbainfear úsáid aisti i gcomhthéacs iontrálacha gan chreatlach reachtach a shainmhíonn úsáid na teiste sin. Mar sin de, i dtaca leis an bpróiseas um iontrálacha iarbhunscoile sa bhliain 2010 ní bheidh teist á cur ar fáil ag an Roinn Oideachais.

In my paper to the Executive I had proposed compromise proposals for three years of bilateral admissions. The Executive refused to discuss these so I am no longer pursuing a legislative framework for these proposals and am therefore withdrawing my Department's commission to CCEA to produce a test for the 2010 transfer process. My Department cannot provide a test for use in an admissions context without a legal framework defining that use. Therefore, for the post-primary admissions process in 2010 there will be no DE-provided test.

In the absence of regulations, my Department is issuing guidance. Schools will be obliged in law to "have regard" for this guidance. On equality grounds but also because of the risks of dysfunction this

guidance recommends that schools do not use academic admissions criteria. If a school chooses to use academic admissions criteria it will have to provide for itself the robust assessment mechanism and procedures that such criteria require.

Otherwise, this Guidance consists, firstly, of a clear factual description of the legal context in which post-primary admissions will operate (and in which there is much continuity) and, secondly, of a series of recommendations to schools on admissions criteria. The Guidance's recommendations have been issued for consultation.

Moltar sa Treoir go mbaineann gach scoil úsáid as modh mar chéad chritéar a chinnteoidh go mbaineann iarrthóirí atá i dteideal Béilí Saora Scoile iontrálacha amach ag an leibhéal céanna agus a fhaigheann gach iarrthóir eile.

The Guidance recommends that all schools use as their first criterion a measure that will ensure that applicants entitled to Free School Meals gain admissions at the same rate as all other applicants. For example, if 20% of applications are from Free School Meal Entitled (FSME) applicants, then at least 20% of the school's places should be allocated to FSME applicants. This is to address the current situation where FSME children have been disadvantaged in terms of access to grammar school places. 1 in 17 children in academically selective schools were FSME while 1 in 4 children in other schools were FSME.

Thereafter the guidance recommends the following menu of criteria

- Sibling;
- Eldest Child;
- Feeder/named primary school;
- Nearest Suitable School;
- Parish (with nearest suitable school);
- Catchment Area (with nearest suitable school);
- Random Selection (tie-breaker).

The Guidance recommends that the geographical criteria (parish and catchment area) are used in conjunction with “nearest suitable school” as a means of ensuring that rural and outlying applicants are not disadvantaged by their address. The school categories that would define school suitability for the purposes of this measure (and for transport) will be as they are now.

The guidance will assure parents, children and schools that whilst there will be no admissions criteria regulation for Transfer 2010, much of the process will be as before.

- The role of the Department of Education will be largely unchanged and it will continue to set the admissions and enrolment numbers for each school.

- Post-primary school Boards of Governors will continue to be the statutory admissions authority for their school and will draw up and publish admissions criteria as they currently do.
- Transfer booklets will continue to issue to parents from November / December 2009 and these will contain each post-primary school's admissions criteria for admissions in 2010.
- Primary Schools will continue to assist parents in advising on the best options for their children and assist in completing the Transfer Form, where parents will show in rank order their preferred post-primary schools. Primary schools are already teaching the revised curriculum. My department and I will ensure that this continues and that the curriculum is no longer distorted by the process of selection.
- Parents/children will apply in February 2010 – using the Transfer Form and listing their preferences;
- The system of preference application will be administered in precisely the same manner;
- Where schools are oversubscribed, post-primary Boards of Governors must select children for admission by application of the criteria;
- Admissions decisions will issue in May 2010.
- One new element will be that, in accordance with a legislative obligation from 2006, DE will establish a body which, in respect of children with exceptional circumstances, will arrange admission to suitable post-primary schools outside of the standard competitive processes. This body is intended to be for

children with compelling medical reasons to attend a particular school and for Looked after Children. Details on this will be communicated as part of the Transfer 2010 communication process.

Beidh mé ag scríobh chuig príomhoidí agus chuig boird gobharnóirí bunscoileanna agus iarbhunscoileanna agus chuig Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne. Beidh mé ag scríobh go díreach chuig tuismitheoirí freisin. Tabharfaidh mise soiléireacht don phróiseas atá anois againn agus tabharfaidh mé muinín do thuismitheoirí go mbeidh próiseas bainistithe iontrála ann, cé nach ndéanfar rialáil ar chritéir iontrála sa dlí.

I will be writing to principals and boards of governors of primary schools and post-primary schools and Education and Library Boards. I will also be communicating directly to parents. I will bring clarity to the situation we are now in and reassure parents that, while admissions criteria will not be regulated in law, there will be a managed admissions process. There is still much to be gained from discussions around key decisions made at 14 and I will continue to work on this with schools. The area based planning exercise focusing on the Entitlement Framework will help to inform these discussions.

This guidance's recommendations will be equality proofed and are being issued for a twelve week consultation. Comments are welcome within that period. What is not subject to consultation are the facts that guidance sets out about the legal position in which the process of

post-primary admissions in 2010 will operate. Schools therefore should have what they need from today in order to be able to respond to the anxiety of parents of P6 children due to transfer in 2010. In particular grammar schools now know that they should decide whether to attempt to use academic admissions criteria through the operation of their own test, or to cease to use academic admissions criteria.

I hope grammar schools choose to stop academic selection not just because of serious difficulties that are likely to accompany any independently operated procedures, but because of the interests and needs of children. 2010 represents an opportunity for all of our grammar schools to make their excellent provision available in a fair manner for the first time. Transfer 2010 represents an opportunity to spare all children the ordeal of assessment for the purposes of admission. Transfer 2010 represents an opportunity to end the inequality of ability-based transfer in which grammar schools are disproportionately the preserve of the better-off. I understand that a school with long-established traditions of academic excellence will wish to continue these and indeed I want such schools to continue these traditions.

What the Department's admissions guidance asks a grammar school to do is sustain these traditions not by exclusion but by the quality of its teaching and learning. The question all grammar schools should ask of themselves is "do we, in order to succeed, require an

admission process that fails most children". I believe that the breakaway grammar schools will in time accept that their pupils are better served if they are part of, rather than outside, the mainstream education system. I am also convinced that when political colleagues see the educationalists working within this Guidance – delivering a quality education for all children – then much of the rancour of recent months will be replaced by a realisation that the old system couldn't continue and perhaps at that time we will return to the issue of legislation.

Idir an dá linn, tá an Treoir againn anois a dhéanfaidh rialáil ar iontrálacha chuig iarbhunscoileanna sa bhliain 2010. Iarraim ar na hiarbhunscoileanna uile breithniú cúramach a dhéanamh air seo agus a bheith ar chomhsheasamh linn agus córas á chruthú a dhíríonn ar riachtanais na bpáistí uile a mhaireann san aois seo. Bogaimis ó chóras atá bunaithe ar phribhléid agus ar stádas, ó chóras diúltaithe agus teipe agus leagaimis bunraitheanna córais atá bunaithe ar cheartas sóisialta, ar chothroime agus ar shármhaitheas. Córas a thugann deis do na páistí ar fad a gcumas féin a bhaint amach. Córas a chaitheann go cothrom leis na páistí ar fad.

In the meantime we now have the Guidance to govern the admission to post-primary schools in 2010. I ask that all post-primary schools consider this carefully and join with the rest of us in creating a system tailored to the needs of all our children in this millennium. Let us move away from a system based on privilege and status, a system of rejection and failure and lay the foundations of a system based upon

social justice, equality and excellence. A system that gives all of our children a chance to realise their full potential. A system that treats all of our children equally.
