

To Sir George Bain and Strategic Review of Education Team

**Submission by Greater Belfast Catholic Maintained Post-Primary
Principals**

November 10th 2006

Preface

Greater Belfast Catholic Maintained Post-Primary Principals Group wishes to thank Sir George Bain and his review team for this opportunity to meet and to put some views of the Group to the team.

Page 2 gives a very simplified version of some of the work undertaken by our Group over many years prior to, and during, post-primary review processes over more recent years.

We apologise in advance for the embarrassingly rushed nature of this submission and hope that the team will be generous enough to forgive some of its shortcomings.

General Background to Group and to Request for Meeting

Our Group has set out its own principles in several position papers / submissions to review bodies and in many meetings with almost all partners in the education service.

We have had numerous meetings over a long period of years with CCMS and with the Catholic Bishops. We have supplied both CCMS and the Bishops with working models for a system of all-ability Catholic post-primary schools serving the 11-19 age range.

Such individual schools, we have argued, might be based on one site or more than one but have a single management team. In doing so, we have taken into account demographic and other factors impacting on all post-primary but especially Catholic post-primary provision in the Greater Belfast area. We have urged a properly phased and planned move rationalization of existing Catholic post-primaries as opposed to an unplanned drift into all-ability schools by default.

We have done so in the clear realisation and acknowledgment that this would be particularly difficult for some of us as principals of schools most likely to disappear under such a rationalization. Closures / amalgamations would inevitably mean that some of our schools would be the first to go. We have done so in the interests of the children we serve and in the belief that a planned outcome was preferable to a slow and less predictable bleeding to death of some of our schools.

Whilst meetings with the Bishops and CCMS have been helpful and we have found agreement on some points echoed in their submissions to review bodies, we still find ourselves unclear as to how a Catholic system might actually look. When ideas are subsumed within the necessarily broader remit of Catholic authorities they may lose something in the translation / transition. That is why we have asked to speak with Sir George and his team.

Terms of Reference of Education Review

As principals we cannot claim to have sufficient expertise in many of the areas that the Strategic Review Team will address within its terms of reference. Some of what we have

to say may have broad implications relevant to financial issues, strategic planning of schools' estate, integrating education and improving collaboration. However, we are not qualified to quantify or closely argue / illustrate many of these implications.

Hopefully, the headings in italics at the start of each section of this submission will indicate some terminology relevant to the review. It is hoped also that the content of each section is self-explanatory albeit quite primitive in its formulation. That content and the general principles to which it adheres have been consistently put in all those contexts in which we have been involved over the years.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF GROUP'S MAIN ACTIONS TO THIS POINT

- Guided by the Group's principles of common interest in Catholic post-primary sector
- Anticipating and urging systemic reform
- Published 3 papers – 'A Fairer Deal'
- Philosophical and rational basis for a non-selective system → to all agencies

- Agreed certain principles to govern systemic change
- End to 11+
- End to all transfer testing
- End to academic selection
- Universal system of 11-18 all-ability schools
- On one site or more than one site
- One SMT
- There were other issues e.g. co-ed as guiding principle not yet fully resolved between us
- These did not prevent Group from suggesting some possible models to Bishops and CCMS

- Group has asked for and had input (including position papers) at various times to
- Meetings with The Catholic Bishops of D&C
 - CCMS
 - DENI (including DE officials and the Minister(s))
 - Meeting with Martin McGuinness in the run up to abolition of the 11+
 - All political parties (by mail to all and face-to-face with some)
 - Burns
 - Costello
 - Media
 - Flyers to all parents re:household survey
 - Teacher Unions including FE
 - University Departments
 - AHTSS (colleagues in controlled sector)
 - All post-primaries (including grammars)

Input to specifically Catholic authorities has included

- a theoretical template model for N and W.Belfast
- 11-18 all-ability schools

- Each of us acknowledged that if any model was to offer the best for our children – then some (perhaps many) of our schools would be losers. This was not easy but the common good was vital
- Since models initially submitted – there has been setting up of Consultative Group on Catholic Education
- There are proposed Project and User Boards and major questions for us are - what is the role of the Principal and exactly where and when in the process are head teachers to be consulted / involved
- Much of the above and much of what we will talk about today was put also to DENI officials 9th March 2006
- Further and more detailed meetings with CCMS Officials
- Meeting requested with Sir George Bain – November 2006

1.0. Multi-sectored provision and a divided society

- 1.1. Terms like ‘multi-sector provision’ and ‘division’ tend to be thought of as resulting from, denoting and applying solely / primarily to systems – maintained (Catholic), controlled (Protestant), integrated and voluntary. We suggest that other and equally, if not more powerful, ‘sectors’ and ‘divisions’ operate within our school system. These other ‘sectors’ and ‘divisions’ are less well known or, at least, are less often mentioned.
- 1.2. There are ‘sectors’ and ‘divisions’ defined by socio-economic background that are common to both main communities in the north. They operate in complex interrelation with each other to reinforce and continue a ‘divided society’. It is probably well beyond the capacity of schools to effect positive change in such factors unless and until reform of the school system coincides with a multi-layered strategy in other aspects of society here. Present forms of socio-economic division are, however, reinforced and perpetuated by a selective education system that serves the interest of some and does disservice to more pupils and parents. Any strategic review of education must contemplate systemic change substantial enough to redress this imbalance in provision and get down to altering causes and conditions that govern such socio-economic division(s).
- 1.3. Our present selective education system continues to reflect, reinforce and perpetuate the relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage of sectors of our whole community. A selective system fuels deprivation and alienation in already multi-disadvantaged Catholic and Protestant working class areas. This could not and should not be tolerated in any society let alone a society that is already as divided as ours.
- 1.4. Each of the existent sectors (maintained, controlled etc) needs to acknowledge, address and seek to redress mechanisms that characterise and connive at stark social divisions within each of their respective internal operations. It is difficult to visualise success for any strategic thinking / planning that does not involve each existent sector in fundamentally addressing this problem as part of the solution.
- 1.5. Since true ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘integration’ ought to begin at home, it is our belief that the Catholic system should ensure that these aims are first attained for all Catholic children within its care. We do not believe that the present Catholic system achieves true ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘integration’ for all the children in its care. When this social justice issue is addressed and redressed by the Catholic system, then perhaps others will see its true value and worth. Whilst we would hope that others would do so as well, we believe that the Catholic system, irrespective of whatever values or legislation / planning underpins state provision, should ensure a fairer deal for all its children. If it did so, then others may or may not follow suit.

2.0. 'A divided society' where the more obvious and most quoted divisions are compounded and exacerbated by socio-economic fragmentation inherent in, and partly attributable to, our two-tiered post-primary / selective system

2.1. To some extent this has been outlined above but even a cursory glance at figures for FSME (Free School Meals Entitlement) indicates that there is a stark division in the socio-economic backgrounds of pupils attending grammar and other post-primary schools. This division is stark in both main communities but is starkest in those schools that serve the Protestant community.

2.2. Since FSME figures are the major determinant of performance at GCSE and since those in the most disadvantaged communities attend non-selective schools, implications are clear. The 'winners' and 'losers' pointed out by Gallagher and others will tend to remain winners and losers. The selective system acts as an engine room maintaining socio-economic division in and between communities in the north

2.3. Reports (Burns, Gallagher) and our own collective experience indicate alienation from, and disaffection with, schools among many young people. They tend in the main to come from communities within the socio-economic groupings served by our schools. They are often young people who feel cut off from mainstream provision offered by all services. They are cut off from access to and contact with their more affluent peers within their own faith community; they are doubly and disastrously cut off from access to and contact with their peers in other faith communities. We believe that schools, individually and collectively and from whichever sector, cannot be held solely or chiefly responsible for this.

2.4. Their sense of alienation has been connived at and compounded by continuous 'failure' that has been foreshadowed by the 11+ and a selective system. However disguised or deferred, selection and allocation to differentiated schools will not help overcome the type of socio-economic division we have outlined above. Such division has little or nothing to do with whether they go to maintained or controlled schools.

2.5. The north of Ireland is characterised by a growing gap between haves and have-nots. Again, this is true within both of the main communities. There is a dangerous division and isolation at work here and it is increasingly evidenced in anti-social behaviour, youth alienation, peer violence, drugs, suicides, crime etc. These are deep-seated and complex problems. Individual schools do not create and cannot solve these problems and even shortcomings in our education system do not create and cannot solve all of them. We believe, however, that substantial reform of the system including abolition of all forms of academic selection and of differentiated types of school can, in conjunction with other measures, offset some of it.

2.6. Change to the system must take account of this. There are financial implications as well. The costs of policing, courts, restorative justice schemes, probation service,

young offenders' centres, prisons, rehabilitation programmes, resettlement services etc are heavy. There may be considerable long-term benefit from much greater short-term investment in a radically reformed education system that coincides with other forms of joined-up targeting of social need

2.7. Radical reform of the education system must mean more than convenient, economically viable local solutions. This is not the forum nor do we have the expertise / knowledge / information (political, economic or logistical) to discuss detailed 'joined-up' thinking / planning a multi-faceted approach to fundamentally altering society in the north. We are disappointed to note, however, that the terms of reference of the review do not specifically mention (much less advocate) any specific egalitarian principles or goals. There is no direct espousal of that type of egalitarian dynamic we would see as essential to long-term, positive change in a society that suffers widely from deep-seated, multi-generational deprivation. Egalitarian policies cannot be said to have failed in the north; they have never been tried in those sustained, complex and multi-faceted ways that would effect looked-for improvement.

2.8. Such an egalitarian dynamic is essential if we are to effectively address the socio-economic divisions that characterise our society. These socio-economic divisions are underlying agents of alienation, separation, conflict and violence within and between communities in the north of Ireland. Much debate about separate educational provision has concentrated on traditional definitions of what constitutes multi-sectored provision i.e. mainly on separate Catholic system. There has been significantly less debate about a system of separate provision that is starkly divisive, operates in both main communities, preserves relative privilege for the few as opposed to the many and reflects as well as perpetuates the differential between groups. These are the results of some of our shared past; a radical redress is essential to a shared future.

2.9. We have argued above that any factors / system(s) reinforcing the present social pyramid and inhibiting potential social mobility for some of our people (our pupils) will continue to fuel divisions in and between communities. We see the present system of selection as one such factor. It is an objective, impersonal and neutral but highly significant contributor to continued division. It is our view that it has not figured highly in the debate precisely because it is most threatening to those who control the terms of that debate – the already privileged who are influential, affluent, articulate and motivated enough to access media and corridors of power. They are in both main communities and, although the complexion is changing, mainly within the more affluent areas of establishment unionism. The debate is not a cerebral argument about the objective merits and demerits of selective systems; it is about the retention of perceived privilege. The attributing of divisions in society to the operation of a separate Catholic system is an intentional or unintentional diversionary tactic.

2.10. Few in the debate point out that the provision of a selective system at taxpayers' expense can, and does on occasion, amount to virtually private schooling for some

already privileged members of this divided society. Changed profiles of entry grades indicate that many pupils who should not be considered capable of benefiting from the much-vaunted 'academic excellence' are admitted to schools that have 'academic excellence' as ethos and aim. This division into tiers of virtually private education is seldom highlighted but many children, Catholic and Protestant, will always be debarred from entering some schools. Because they do not live in certain areas and they will never qualify for entry. We believe that these overarching divisions cannot be allowed to continue. Social justice, ethics, morality and the need for political stability all argue against it.

2.11. For all of the reasons above and in the belief that these types of division are those which a revised school system may be able to influence, we would urge change in this direction as opposed to changes / challenges to the rights of particular faith schools to exist and function. We suspect, indeed we know, that many (perhaps all) of these points in relation to our selective system would be endorsed by our colleagues in post-primary schools in the controlled sector. We would dearly love to see a system of all-ability schools for 11-19 right across the north. We have argued with CCMS, the Northern Bishops and others, however, that the Catholic system should act in accordance with its own avowed aims and objectives and implement such changes irrespective of what action is taken by the state.

It is our opinion that nothing in a system of Catholic schools prevents, precludes or militates against a shared future as talked about in British government and other documents. The future of young people in both main communities would best be served by a *shared strategy that simultaneously addresses multiple disadvantages whilst eradicating those mechanisms within our selective system that create an engine room sustaining and compounding those disadvantages.*

3.0. *Schools and school systems can only effect desired societal change when other and arguably more dynamic forms of integration have been or will be implemented. Systems of separate Catholic provision elsewhere are not held to be accountable for major divisions in society*

3.1. Our experience of schools (maintained and controlled schools) indicates that, far from being divisive, they have worked hard and succeeded admirably as moderating influences. This has happened against a backdrop of civil commotion and strife fuelled by divisions and factors over which schools have little or no control.

3.2. The notion that separate sectors (as defined by religion) of school provision have been a primary or even partial contributor to division is simplistic. That few children presently attend schools of management types / religious ethos different to their own is much more attributable to effects of other long-term and often deliberately discriminatory practices in aspects of society here. The divisive and corrosive effects of separate housing, separate employment, hugely unrepresentative workplaces, massively imbalanced career opportunities, separate investment, infrastructure, etc over generations need to be addressed before any system of faith schools is questioned. These factors are at the heart of divisions in the north of Ireland. Coupled with the shrinking manufacturing base and other dramatic changes in employment profiles they deliver a socio-economic pattern that needs addressing.

3.3. Given that our schools serve the areas most drastically affected and that such schools are left to pick up the pieces of our divisive selective education system, we believe that we are in a position to estimate and advocate some changes that may be brought about by the introduction of a non-selective system. The psychology, self-esteem, aspirations, attitudes and attainment of the children we serve can be raised significantly by the introduction of a system of all-ability schools 11-19 within the Catholic sector

3.4. Negative comments emanating from some politicians and much of the media about 'multi-sectored provision' and 'division' have been levelled most specifically and most often at Catholic schools. We have suggested that this is both inaccurate and blatantly unfair. Most criticism levelled at separate Catholic provision has come from some who have talked of *integrated education* whilst actually advocating a system of *integrated schools*. We see no reason why Catholic schools cannot provide opportunities for integrated education. The ways in which such integration can be accommodated are many and various provided that the schools first accommodate and provide for Catholic parents and children. Integrated education need not mean the removal or diminution of strong Catholic school system.

3.5. We have no argument with the entitlement of anyone to advocate integrated education and / or integrated schools. Parental choice of a specific system is

something we would endorse. We would insist, however, that here should be no limiting or removal of parental right to choose a Catholic school.

- 3.6. Separate Catholic provision elsewhere in the world has seldom, if ever, been seen as an active instrument of civil strife and community division. In fact, it is arguable that such schools are seen as providing the best possible education in civics etc for *all* children who attend them.
- 3.7. Recent endorsements of an integrated system in the north by British direct rule ministers, past and present, will not surprise anyone – least of all northern Catholics! Some British government pronouncements on imposed quotas in faith schools in England were hastily withdrawn in the face of determined and principled leadership by some English Catholic bishops. There was also the fact that many Catholic schools had within them children from other religious denominations and from none. There is no reason to suppose that an efficient, properly self-confident Catholic system in a more just and open-minded society in Northern Ireland would be any different. Creation of that more just and more open-minded society will not result from changing the Catholic school system but from larger and more complex compensatory strategies. Educational reform should concentrate on those factors within the system that perpetuate disadvantage across the board.

4.0. Some points re: school rationalization/ planning based on an-all ability system for the Catholic sector in the Greater Belfast area.

4.1. The main principles advocated by our Group of head teachers have been outlined above. We have put these principles to CCMS and Catholic Bishops on many occasions over the years. Some years back and in response to an assertion that no models had been supplied by any group(s) within the Catholic sector debate we furnished CCMS and the Bishops with some models for

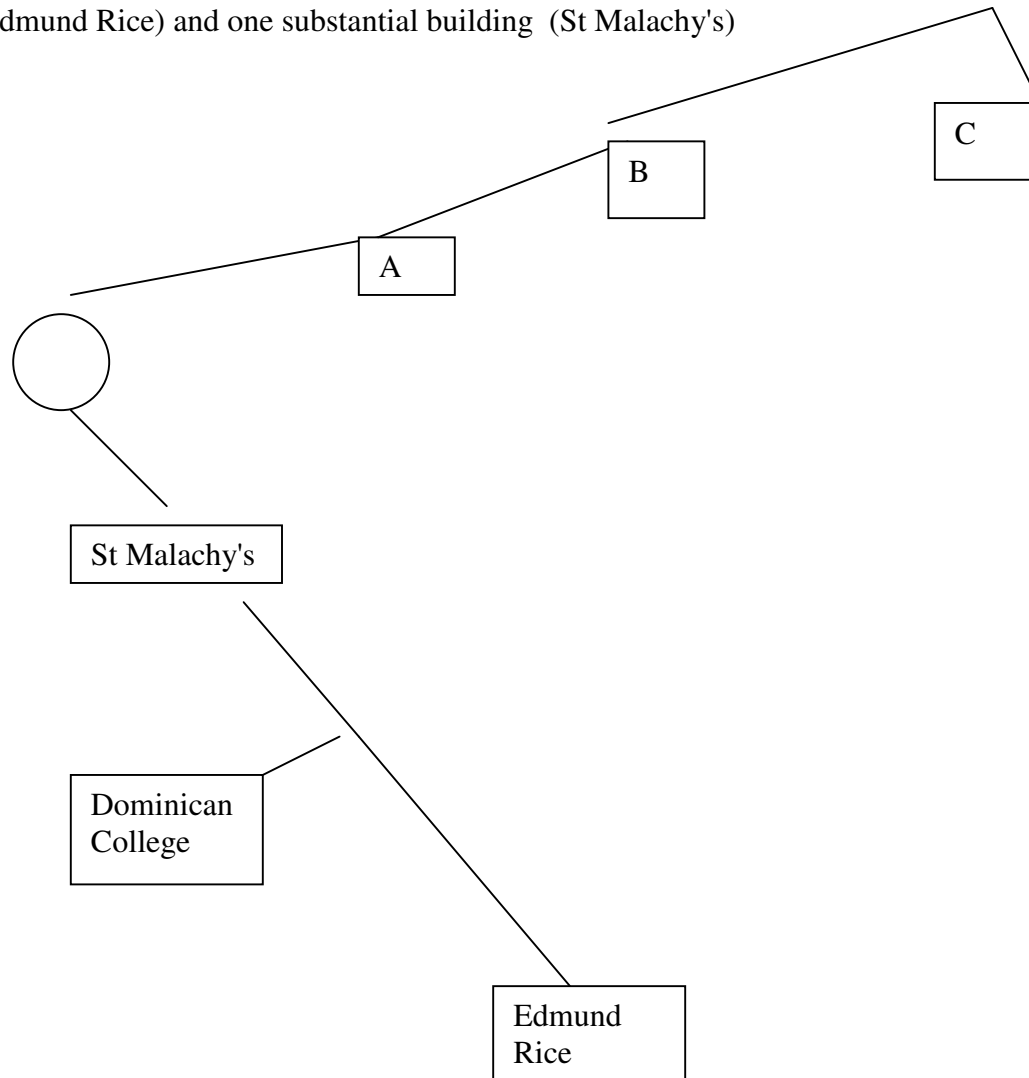
- A system of all-ability schools serving the age range 11-19
- A system that would respond to demographic and other trends within the Greater Belfast area
- A system that would maximize resources – physical, human and material within the Catholic sector
- A system that, although our model preceded the Burns Report, reflected some modified versions of collegiates /collegiality as contained in the Report. In the Catholic system in the first instance but with potential for contact with others
- A system that would create new post-primary ‘schools’ that could exist on one site or more than one site with individual new schools having a single management type
- A system that ensured that all schools within it could have vocational and academic as well as SEN provision under the umbrella of a single management focus
- A system that tried to look at parish / neighbourhood dimension and the creation of efficient partnerships between pre-school, primary school and post-primary schools in each new school area
- A system that might free up some plant, create flexibility and perhaps solve some transport problems / costs

We did not have the expertise to analyse such proposals in precise detail. However, we suggested that the broad idea was worthy of consideration and analysis.

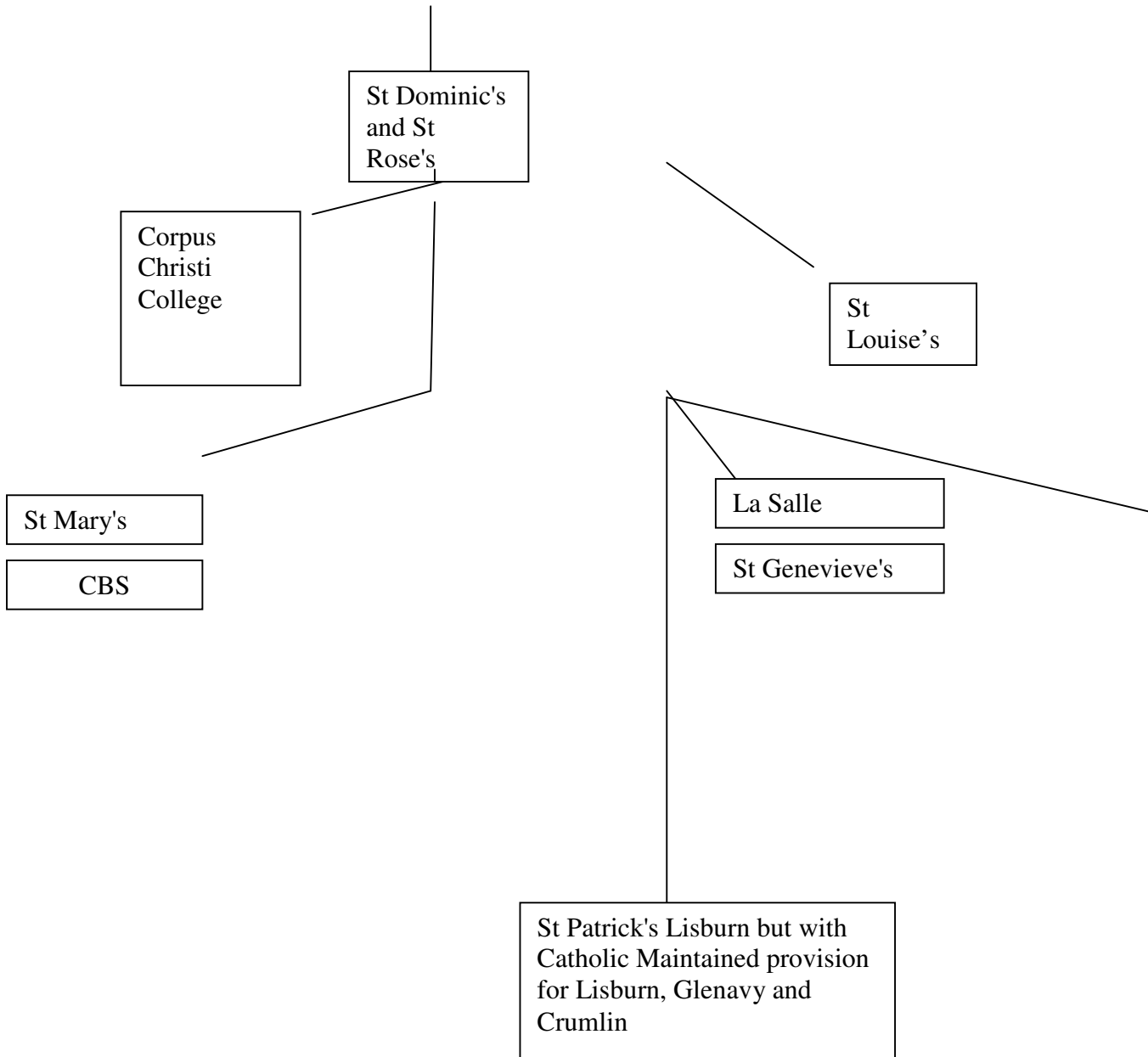
4.2. We include below (for illustration purposes) one rudimentary sketch of one scenario which was ‘fleshed’ out in considerably more detail at our own meetings. It serves no other purpose here than to indicate some of the work the Group undertook. We would have welcomed opportunity to put several models that would have brought into play many of those factors – demographics, plant, resources, staffing issues, finance, transport, curriculum provision, targeting of social need, questions of parental choice, co-education-that may have had relevance to a strategic review within the Catholic sector.

4.3. NORTH BELFAST

Basically identified 3 sites that are recent 'new build' (Dominican College), one green field site (Edmund Rice) and one substantial building (St Malachy's)



WEST / SOUTH / LISBURN



- 4.4. Rationalisation of this type would have sought to provide first for the Catholic sector based on principles that we believe should characterize Catholic provision. Facilities and resources freed up could have provided opportunity for shared use. This could have ranged from carefully co-ordinated cooperative interaction between contributory primary and partner post-primary schools. It could too have included shared provision with other partners / other schools within other communities.
- 4.5. The Group believes that some of these ideas should be put to the new groups that have been set up by Catholic authorities to review the post-primary system. They may or may not influence deliberations at that stage. Thus far we have put any ideas / models to Catholic authorities believing that it is to that sector that we owe our first duty as individual and as a group of principals. We remain unclear as yet as to the extent to which or ways in which they will ever or will not ever play a part in strategic thinking within that sector.
- 4.6. As stated earlier we saw the potential of such models to reflect modified forms of collegiality / co-operation as advocated in the Burns Report. Applied to the Catholic system in the first instance we suggested that they might play a part in influencing thinking within other sectors and might also provide opportunity to facilitate forms of integration / partnership with others. Whilst these were not fully explored at the stage of formulating our models, some broad possibilities were clear
- facilities and resources available in the proposed ‘new’ post-primary schools
 - facilities and resources in some buildings that might have been the location of 11-14, 14-16 and 16-19 provision – surplus capacity where applicable
 - facilities and resources that were freed up due to closures / amalgamations and where buildings, sites and / or land could be re-dedicated to shared purpose
 - finance from sale / leasing of land / buildings to be ploughed back into some or all of these types of provision

Summary:

Once again we would apologise for the rushed nature of this submission. It represents some necessarily partial (in two senses of the word) thinking of a small group of Catholic post-primary systems. However, having contributed to all review bodies and agencies thus far, we felt that we would like to have some input to the Strategic Review.

There are points within this submission that relate solely to the Catholic sector. There are, however, issues and ideas that spring from overarching concerns common to all in the north of Ireland. Responses to such concerns and any consequent systemic change(s) will govern and affect the life-chances of generations of young people.

As individuals and as a Group of head teachers we are not responsible for, nor are we capable of, the creation of outcomes. We are, however, responsible for the part we play or fail to play in the process. We argue and have argued consistently for certain deeply held principles and from long experience. We wish the Strategic Review well and are certain that the team, like us, will seek to ensure a fairer deal for ALL our children.

