

**Minister's address to post-primary principals and governors 21 June  
2010**

Go raibh maith agaibh as teacht anseo ar maidin. Tá lúchair orm an deis a bheith agam chun bualadh libh go léir ag deireadh na scoilbhliana gnóthaí seo. Ní comhdháil í an ócáid inniu. Ba mhaith liom é a bheith ina chomhrá cuiditheach fadradharcach neamhfhoirmeálta faoinár dtodhchaí.

Thank you for coming along this morning. I am delighted to have the opportunity to meet with you all towards the end of a busy school year. Today is not a conference. I want it to be an informal, constructive and far-sighted conversation about our future.

There are two practical prompts for this occasion.

First, I will very soon publish the Department's Guidance for Transfer 2011 and onward. I am officially re-stating the Department's policy on post-primary transfer and admissions.

You all know my position on transfer and on the flaws and inequalities around a system based on selecting children through testing at the age of 10 or 11. It was particularly divisive and hurtful for children. It was also harmful for the Curriculum in the Primary School. It is out of date, unnecessary and a block to progress.

Is soiléir atá an gá le hathrú agus bhí sé sin soiléir sa bhliain Dhá Mhíle is a Dó nuair a rinne Martin McGuinness a chinneadh.

The need to change the system is clear and was clear way back in 2002 when Martin McGuinness made his decision.

The 11 Plus is now gone. It will not be replaced by any other such academic testing as part of our Transfer procedures.

The policy of the Department of Education is for a non-selective education system, based around delivery of the revised curriculum and Entitlement Framework. The current group of P7 children have benefitted from the curriculum that has empowered teachers. They have not had to have their curriculum distorted by a state-run testing process.

Foilseoidh mo Roinn Treoir ar Aistriú roimh i bhfad a mbeidh feidhm aici san am atá le teacht. Athdheimhnítear sa Treoir ár dtiomantas do chóras neamhroghnach aistrithe iarbhunscoile a thacóidh le córas oideachais iarbhunscoile a bheidh bunaithe ar chomhionannas, ar dheiseanna agus ar shármhaitheas.

My Department will publish soon Transfer Guidance to apply into the future. This new Guidance reaffirms our commitment to a non-selective system of post-primary transfer truly supporting a system of post-primary education founded on equality, opportunity and excellence.

Many, not all, schools/parents share my views on the 11+. Both within the education sector and beyond it there is a large and growing appreciation that selecting 10 and 11-year-olds by crudely-assessed ability is deeply negative and unnecessary.

It is not a necessary part of higher standards as evidenced by Finland and other places. The results and successes of many of the post-primary schools present here today demonstrate this also.

I warmly welcome the stand taken on transfer by the Commission for Catholic Education and the consultation they have launched on post-primary

education. They recognise the need to move away from testing at the age of 11 and towards an all-ability entry to post-primary schools.

The other prompt for today is that I wanted to give you a pre-briefing on the nature of the Department's new Guidance on the role of Development Proposals for schools seeking to end their academically-selective admissions processes. This will be published shortly.

I am delighted that a number of grammar schools wish to embark on this change.

Cuideoidh an ócáid inniu leo chun tús a chur leis an obair seo. Tá lúchair orm gur fhreastail an oiread seo meánscoileanna ar an ócáid seo fosta. Cé gur saincheist a bhaineann le scoileanna gramadaí den chuid is mó í saincheist chealú an roghnaithe acadúil, baineann cruthú córas oideachais iar-roghnaithe linn go léir.

Today will enable them to start this journey. I am delighted that so many secondary schools are attending today also. Whilst the ending of academic selection is primarily an issue for grammar schools, creating the new post-selective post-primary system is for all of us.

I hope we can engage on that this morning.

Development Proposals are not an obstacle to change.

Rather they can be the way in which real and lasting change is effectively secured.

I have been contacted by grammar schools wanting to move away from selection. They should not be misled into believing that formidable processes or barriers stand in their way. I want to encourage them and help them appreciate the clear and positive nature of the Development Proposal

process. This is without prejudice to my formal role in reaching decisions on proposals.

I stress the positive nature of the process because I am aware that there are some concerns that Development Proposals present some legal impediment to change. The need for development proposals is determined by their purpose.

The purpose is to ensure that all interested parties are informed about proposed significant changes to a school, or schools, and have an opportunity to comment on such proposals before decisions are taken. This is to facilitate consultation with key stakeholders.

Más rud é, mar sin, go mbaineann pleananna scoile ar chealú an roghnaithe acadúil le hathruithe a bhfuil riachtanach di agus go dtéann siad i bhfeidhm go mór ar scoil eile, bheadh na hathruithe seo faoi réir Togra Forbartha.

If, therefore, a school's plans for the ending of academic selection involve changes that are significant for them and impact significantly on another school then these changes should be the subject of a Development Proposal.

This, I believe, was recognised by the Catholic Bishops when they indicated that they would move away from academic selection. They were allowing time to engage with all the stakeholders to ensure that they understood the need for change, the benefits it would bring for all the young people in an area and also to dispel the myths and fears that are perpetuated around academic selection and the transfer procedure.

Since 2003, Departmental Guidance has stated that one change in a school's character that would be significant enough to require a development proposal would be an academically selective school changing to become non-selective.

Despite this, Development Proposals have rarely been about the removal of academic selection to date.

Tá muid ag cíoradh, faoi láthair, threoir Roinne na bliana Dhá Mhíle is a Trí ar Thograí Forbartha lena chinntiú go mbeidh na tagairtí atá cuimsithe faoi athrú “suntasach” ábhartha i gcomhthéacs an pholasaí reatha.

We are currently reviewing the Department’s 2003 guidance on Development Proposals to ensure the references included under “significant” change are relevant in the current policy context.

Detailed guidance published will assist schools who wish to abandon academic selection. The guidance will help schools to prepare the supporting information to accompany a Development Proposal for this change.

It will outline the considerations my Department will undertake in reaching a decision on such a Development Proposal.

It will also detail the timeframe required to complete the process.

It will provide you with templates that cover all the issues and will suggest sources from which the relevant information can be drawn.

Aibhseoidh sé go ndéanfar cinntí sa chomhthéacs straitéiseach de phleanáil cheantair agus de scoileanna inbhuanaithe agus díreofar an fócas ar na leasa do dhaoine óga, ní ar institiúid aonair ach ar an réimse níos leithne.

It will highlight that decisions will be taken in the strategic context of area planning and sustainable schools and the focus will be on benefits for young people not just in a single institution but in the wider area.

All development proposals received from schools planning to end the use of academic criteria will be processed as quickly as possible by my Department.

Development proposals are not an obstacle to change. Far from it, they are, in fact, a vehicle of change through which you can indicate:-

- the case for change;
- your vision for the future of the school; and
- the intended benefits for young people at the school, and indeed, in other schools in the local community

Lorraine Finlay will be providing more detail on the process later this morning.

But now I want to look ahead. There is, an enormous focus on education and rightly so. I welcome and will continue to welcome honest and constructive conversation.

That, above all, is what today is for. There is now enough momentum for change to start looking at what the future offers to us.

What kind of post-primary system will there be after academic selection?

What kinds of schools will it contain? What kind of provision will these offer?

Go hidéalach, rachadh Togra Forbartha agus clár um athrú i ngleic leis na ceisteanna seo

Ideally, it is these questions that a Development Proposal and change programme will address.

For instance, will a grammar school that ends academic selection still be a “grammar school”?

Grammar schools can remain legally defined as grammar schools when they end academic selection unless they choose explicitly to remove this status through the formal process of a Development Proposal. Should they do this or not?

What about neighbouring secondary schools? The ending of one school’s academic admissions may require consideration of the impact on neighbouring schools.

Why would these neighbouring schools not have a significant partnership role within a change that may impact upon them?

Why would the ending of one school’s academic admissions not be one part of an area’s visionary plan for the delivery of education to its children – drawing on the contributions of all of that area’s schools?

Does this not offer the prospect of each area being served by a range of diverse schools:

- complementing each other in their delivery of the Entitlement Framework,
- flexible in capacity and numbers and working together in their chosen management model:
- from collaboration to amalgamation?

Consider how effective a direction this would be, for instance, in terms of making sure that all areas were served by viable sixth forms offering an appropriate range of courses.

Tá mé ag tabhairt deis do gach scoil inniu agus ba mhaith liom é a rá go soiléir gur cuireadh do gach iarbhunscoil é seo. Ní mór go mbainfear sa chóras iarbhunscoile le gach scoil a bheith againn in ionad acadúil roghnaithe.

I am today presenting an open door to all schools and I want to make it crystal clear that this really is an invitation to all post-primary schools. The post-primary system we will have after academic selection must involve all schools.

I want all of you to be architects of a new system. I urge you, as Principals and Chairs of Boards of Governors, to offer leadership across your communities. Post-primary schools need to consider how best they can serve their communities in a future based on a non-selective transfer system.

Ní mór dúinn curaclam comhleanúnach leathan a sholáthar trí phleanáil straitéiseach agus trí phleanáil churaclaim. Tá an méid sin tuillte ag ár bpáistí.

We must deliver a broad and coherent curriculum through sensible and coherent area-based strategic and curriculum planning. Our children deserve this.

We will shortly be addressing public expenditure plans for the next four years. I will be arguing vigorously, for children, for schools, for education. I need to set out the vision to deliver on my priorities

- raising standards
- improving access
- development of the workforce
- improving the learning environment
- transforming management
- equality at the core of our education system

I need your help to paint this vision in competing with other demands. So I want to spend some time now in debate and discussion.

I have embarked on reform of the education system in the interests of all our children. We need to have an open honest dialogue. I want all schools of whatever management type to help to shape a different future, where children transfer at 11 without the trauma of testing.

Ba mhaith liom gach scoil a obair le chéile chun soláthar oideachais den scoth a chinntiú ina gcuid ceantar. Mar sin de, cuirfidh mé ceist ghríosaitheach dhúshlánach oraibh chun í a mheas le chéile – ceist a chuir na meánscoileanna den scoth atá anseo agus a bhaineann torthaí a bhíonn inchurtha le gach cineál scoile anseo agus in aon mhúnla idirnáisiúnta cheana féin.

I want all schools to work together to ensure excellent academic provision in their areas. So, I put to you a provocative and challenging question for you to consider together – a question already posed by those excellent secondary schools represented here who achieve results that compare with any kind of school here and in any international model.

If the grammar school of the future will be a non-selective school delivering excellent provision and high standards in terms of academic and/or professional/technological education, is that not what all schools would aspire to be?

If so how do we get there? I look forward to a lively discussion.