

Shadow Report

by

Educate Together

Ag Foghlaim le Chéile

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**on The First National Report to the United Nations
Committee on the Convention on the Elimination
of all Forms of Racial Discrimination**

by
IRELAND

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Introduction

Educate Together is the national representative organization for multi-denominational schools in Ireland. It is fully recognized by the Irish State as a patron of schools, a registered charity and a properly founded and managed not-for-profit company.

It is the only national provider of legally inclusive primary schools in Ireland.

Educate Together schools operate on the basis of a commitment to provide “equality of access and esteem to children irrespective of their social cultural or religious backgrounds”.

At present there are 35 such schools in Ireland representing just over 1% of the total primary system of approximately 3,150 primary schools.

Educate Together is presenting this report to the CERD Committee as it has fundamental concerns that the Irish State’s policies towards primary education are at variance with the following articles of the Convention:-

Article 5 (d) (vii)

Article 2 1 (a)

Article 2 1 (c)

Article 2 1 (e)

Article 7

Article 5

The Irish primary education system is overwhelmingly controlled by specific religious interests. 98% of all schools are privately owned by religious organisations and recent legislation has strengthened the control of religious organisations over the operational practices of schools. (See Table 1)

As the government's own website states *"The National [State funded primary] school system was established in 1831. The national schools were originally meant to be mixed religion or multi-denominational as we would describe them today. In practice, that did not happen and virtually all national schools are under the management of one church."*¹

The religious or "denominational" nature of the system was enshrined in the "Rules for National Schools" published in 1965. In 1971, the traditional separation of literary and moral education from religious instruction was broken down in the "New Curriculum". This curriculum required that the religious ethos of the school permeate the whole programme. This effectively annulled the right of parents to absent their children from specific denominational content in schools. The Education Act (1998) obliged the Board of Management of a National school to promote the religious ethos of its patron. The Equal Status Act (2000) included specific exemptions for schools that allow them to discriminate on religious grounds to maintain their characteristic religious spirit.

There has been much recent media comment on this situation. As Fintan O'Toole explains in the *The Irish Times* (national paper of record) *"State Spending on primary education is approaching €2 billion a year. Yet a system funded by a secular state and run to an overwhelming extent by lay people is still run according to the ethos of one Church. It is also specifically allowed by Irish law to discriminate against children of other faiths."*²

Catherine Reilly writing in *Metro Eireann* (a journal for immigrant communities) gives an even more blatant example of this practice *"In a letter issued last August to Catholic primary schools in Dublin, schools are advised to draw up enrolment policies that "clearly state" that non-Catholic children can only be accepted if there are vacancies left unfilled by Catholics."*³

Whilst it is desirable for a State to ensure that parents may choose specific religious education if they wish, **it is a clear violation of Article 5 (d) (vii) of the Convention to fail to ensure that there is alternative inclusive provision available to the population.**

In Article 5 (d) (vii) of the Convention, States Parties undertake to guarantee the right of everyone without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin ... the enjoyment of the following rights ... in particular: ... The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Due to the failure of the State to realistically support the development of multi-denominational/legally inclusive schools and make this alternative available to the vast majority of the population, this article is violated in the following ways:-

¹ http://www.oasis.gov.ie/education/primary_education/types_primary_school.html

² Fintan O'Toole 'Catholics should go public', *The Irish Times*, October 12th, 2004

³ Catherine Reilly 'Schools asked to accept Catholic children before those of other faiths', *Metro Eireann*, October, 2004

Access to those holding different faiths is restricted, especially where there is a shortage of spaces in schools, when it can be withheld. This can force parents holding different faiths to travel long distances to access an appropriate school for their children.

Parents holding different views are compelled to send their children to schools that uphold religious views that contradict their own religion, thought or conscience.

Children of different faiths often have to stand outside classes, go to a office or even sit at the back of a class when doctrinal instruction take place thus creating potential for social isolation, exclusion and bullying.

Parents are pressurized to allow a child attend religious classes against their conscience due to concerns for their child's socialisation.

Children are repeatedly exposed to educational content and practices that may be prejudicial to their family culture.

Teachers can be required to teach as religious truth views that they do not themselves hold.

Staff members who do not hold the religious views of the school can be legally discriminated against.

In an historical phase in which there is rapid diversification of the Irish population on religious, ethnic, cultural and racial grounds, the failure to develop a network of inclusive primary educational provision is actively discriminating against those who do not hold majority faiths. (See Table 2) It violates the rights of children, families and teachers. It also frustrates the wishes of the large numbers of those of the majority faiths who wish to see their children educated in an atmosphere of inclusion and equity. It is directly counter-productive to the objective of bringing forward future generations who have grown up in an atmosphere of respect, inclusion and equality between peoples of different faiths, ethnicities and cultures.

The inactivity of the State in this situation runs counter to the various considerations, convictions and resolutions of the Preamble to the Convention.

Educate Together believes that it is impossible to completely eradicate racist attitudes in a society without ensuring that the primary education system practically models attitudes of inclusion and respect for difference and equality. **In this regard, we ask the committee to pay particular attention to primary education in their consideration of the actions taken by the Irish State to implement the Convention.**

Article 2

The Irish State provides only minimal financial and no administrative support for the development of new schools that provide equality of access and esteem irrespective of social, cultural or religious backgrounds.

Financial Aid

Educate Together received a total of €44,800 in grant aid from the Department of Education and Science in 2004. This represents 7% of the current costs of maintaining the organization and only 10% of its current income. (See Table 3) This funding has not kept pace with inflation in the Irish economy over the past three years. In point of fact, in 2003, the organisation contributed more to the State in taxes paid on expenditure supported by private fundraising than it received in grant aid.

All the costs of making an application to open a new Educate Together school must be borne by the local community who have to source the accommodation in which the school can open. These costs run to an average of €30,000 per application. (See Table 4)

If the community cannot source accommodation, the school is prevented from opening, irrespective of the scale of demand for such a school. By connecting the right to education with access to property, the State inherently discriminates against newly emerging, socially disadvantaged or minority communities.

The State imposes unfair charges on communities occupying new State-owned Educate Together schools causing them serious financial difficulties. (See Table 5)

The State provides no support for the training of teachers to teach the non-discriminatory, inclusive ethos of Educate Together schools but provides extensive resources to teacher training colleges to train teachers to work in schools operated by the two main religions. Educate Together has to privately fund-raise to support its ethical education programme and any in-service training for the teachers in its schools. (See Table 6)

Whilst the Irish State has supported initiatives on human rights in some areas of the system, these initiatives have been inserted as additional classes or projects. The promotion of a culture of human rights, anti-racism and respect for diversity must be seen as a core objective of the entire life of a school and schools must be encouraged to implement and live out these objectives in all aspects of their operation. Educate Together is the only patron body in Ireland to have published a programme of ethical education that encapsulates these objectives and a legal charter that binds itself to them. It has received no support from the State for this work.

In the supports provided for immigrant children who are not fluent in English, the Irish State only provides support for a period of two years. Whilst this may be sufficient for children starting school in their 4th or 5th year, it is inappropriate for older immigrant children who may need language support for a longer period. The State makes no provision for older children to receive their education in their home language or for translation facilities to enable schools to interact effectively with parents who do not have adequate command of English.

The State refuses to plan for the orderly deployment of a national network of inclusive primary schools that would address the violations of the Convention that have been outlined in this report.

Educate Together holds that these failures contradict the undertaking made by the Irish State in Article 2 (a) "...to engage in no act or practice of racial discrimination against persons, groups of persons or institutions..." in Article 2 (c) "...to take effective measures to review governmental

policies...and to amend, rescind or nullify any laws and regulations that have the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination ..." in Article 2 (e) "...to encourage, where appropriate, integrationist, multi-racial organisations and movements..."

Article 7

Fundamentally, the Irish State's policies in primary education, by refusing to provide realistic and appropriate support for the multi-denominational sector to ensure that all families can access a school in which their identity is guaranteed equality and respect, violates the undertaking it made in Article 7 of the Convention:-

"States Parties undertake to adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching and education, culture and information, with the view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and to promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups, as well as to propagating the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and this Convention."

Recommendations

Educate Together asks the Committee to recommend that the Irish State:-

Actively supports the development of a national network of schools that provide legal guarantees to ensure that all children enjoy equality of access and esteem irrespective of their social, racial, ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds.

Encourages the primary school network to develop schools that adopt practices that ensure equality of esteem and access to all children irrespective of their social, cultural, racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds.

Ensures that no family has to travel an unreasonable distance each day to access a school in which their identity is guaranteed equality.

Allocates appropriate resources of the Department of Education and Science to ensure the orderly development of such a network of primary schools.

Provides realistic funding for the organisations promoting such a network of schools.

Supports the development of Curricula that encapsulate the objectives of the Convention

Removes the financial and administrative burdens on communities attempting to establish such schools.

Table 1
Distribution of Irish Primary Schools according to Religious Ethos, 2002-2003*

Catholic	2,919	93%
Church of Ireland	184	5.8%
Multi-denominational	30	0.9%
Presbyterian	13	0.5%
Inter-denominational	4	0.1%
Muslim	2	0.06%
Methodist	1	0.03%
Jewish	1	0.03%
Other	1	0.03%
Total	3,155	100%

Table 2
Census Results 1991 and 2002 Religious Affiliation#

<i>Religion</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>Actual Change 1991-2002</i>	<i>Percentage Change 1991-2002</i>
Catholic	3,228,327	3,462,203	234,279	7.3
Church of Ireland	89,187	115,611	26,424	29.6
Other Christian	16,329	21,403	5,074	31.1
Presbyterian	13,199	20,582	7,383	55.9
Muslim	3,875	19,147	15,272	394.1
Orthodox	358	10,437	10,079	2,815.4
Methodist	5,037	10,033	5,021	99.2
Other stated religion	19,762	40,026	20,264	102.5
No religion	66,270	138,264	71,994	108.6
Not stated	83,375	79,094	-4,281	-5.1
Total	3,525,719	3,917,203	391,484	11.1

* Most recent figures available. Obtained from the Department of Education and Science, 13th December 2004

Published by the Central Statistics Office. 8th April, 2004 www.cso.ie

Table 3
State Aid to Multi-denominational Education 2000-2004*

Year	Amount	Income of Sector	% Government Contribution
2004	€44,900	€446,765	10%
2003	€39,800	€445,947	9%
2002	€39,800	€356,139	11%
2001	€55,349	€110,743	50%
2000	€35,172	€61,071	58%

Table 4
Average costs of the establishment of one new multi-denominational school
1 year period (2003)*

Publicity/Media		€
	Printing leaflets	1,000
	Posting of information to prospective parents	500
	Leaflet delivery	350
Fundraising		
	Room hire	500
	Printing tickets/leaflets	2,000
	Advertising events	500
Communication		
	Phone costs	1,000
	e-mail costs	500
	Stationery/stamps	500
	photocopying	500
Venue		
	Weekly committee meeting Room hire	2,500
	Public meetings – room hire	500
Recruitment		
	Advertisement – Principal teacher (national paper)	1,200
	Advertisement – teachers	800
	Venue hire	100
Premises		
	Rent (calendar year)	6,350
	Architects Report x 2	6,000
	Valuers Report x 2	700
	Rent May - September	4,000
		€29,500

* Source Annual Audited Accounts Educate Together, year 2001 was of 18 months to synchronise with State tax year, 2004 provisional figure.

* Development Officer Report, Educate Together, 2003

Table 5
Costs Imposed on local parent body occupying new State-owned school buildings[♥]

Capital contribution	€63,500
Insuring the State's interest in the building	€7,195
Total	€70,695

Table 6
Teacher Training Colleges in Ireland[▲]

College	Religion
The Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin	Anglican
St. Patrick's College, Dublin	Roman Catholic
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	Roman Catholic
The Froebel College of Education, Dublin	Roman Catholic
St. Mary's College of Education, Marino, Dublin	Roman Catholic

[♥] Letters to new schools, 2003, Annual Survey of Educate Together schools, 2004 average of eleven schools occupying State-owned buildings

[▲] Source Department of Education Website. Note a new on-line college, Hibernia, has commenced operation. This college appears not to have a denominational legal basis.