

St. John the Baptist P.S.
250 Garvaghy Road
Portadown
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Principal:
Miss C McCooe

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11 February 2022

Dear Parent / Guardian

I am writing to inform you regarding a potentially significant development in education legislation, which could impact on the future of St. John the Baptist Primary School and indeed all Catholic maintained schools.

Currently a private member's bill, the 'Integrated Education Bill', is progressing through its final stages in the Northern Ireland Assembly. It aims to elevate Integrated Schools above every other type of school.

The Bill as introduced will put education bodies in an impossible position by placing additional duties that will create conflict with their existing duties. There is a finite education budget, which is already stretched, and no one should be under any illusion that if the Bill is not amended appropriately it will put further pressures on that budget.

Concerningly, if this Bill is passed in its current form, the legislation will potentially advantage the integrated sector over all other sectors on a range of educational issues. St. John the Baptist Primary School and indeed all Catholic maintained schools in Northern Ireland will not benefit from this. Details of the bill can be found at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2017-2022-mandate/non-executive-bill-proposals/integrated-education-bill/>.

Catholic maintained schools are part of a global network of 60 million pupils of all faiths and none. We believe parents should continue to have the right to access equitable education for all. Catholic maintained schools continue to be the very heartbeat of communities and as you know, our school is well established and has been supporting this area for many years. It is open to all children and young people as a safe space to be educated together, as are all schools across the wider Catholic maintained sector. Prior to drafting there was no direct consultation with schools, parents, or the community about the practical implications of this Bill. There are a number of different school types in Northern Ireland, and it is important that each type of school has equal access to resources, funding and opportunities and that one school type is not elevated above another. We also firmly believe that all children and young people should be educated together. This is happening not only in St. John the Baptist Primary School but throughout other Catholic maintained schools. This Bill ignores the diversity of Catholic schools and assumes diversity is only possible in an integrated school.

Our managing authority, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), has engaged directly with Principal Groups to update them on the challenges that this Bill will bring should it pass into legislation. CCMS have also given evidence to the Assembly Committee for Education stating the above, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvAJ5dixlly&t=2609s>. In addition, CCMS has, and continues to, engage with individual Assembly Members (MLAs), local councillors and members of the press to

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articulate the profound concerns of the Catholic maintained sector on an ongoing basis

<http://onlineccms.com/index.php/2-uncategorised/428-catholic-schools-deliver-for-all-communities>

If you share our concerns, we would ask you to ensure that all our local (MLAs) are aware of this, **as a matter of urgency**. The Bill is scheduled to reach its final stages in the Assembly later in February. It is important that the wider community is aware of our concerns around the considerable impact of this Bill on St. John the Baptist Primary School.

I have attached to this correspondence the email addresses of the MLAs who represent our constituency. Your local Councillors can be found on the Local District Council webpage.

I thank you for taking the time to read my concerns and would encourage you to act if you share them.

Yours sincerely

C. McCoole

Principal

Chair of Governors

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Members of Assembly Committee for Education			
Constituency	Representative	Party	Email address
Belfast East	Chris Lyttle	Alliance	chris.lyttle@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
Belfast East	Robin Newton	DUP	robin.newton@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
Belfast West	Pat Sheehan	Sinn Féin	pat.sheehan@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
Lagan Valley	Robbie Butler	UUP	robbie.butler@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
Newry and Armagh	Justin McNulty	SDLP	justin@mcnulty@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
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Upper Bann	Diane Dodds	DUP	diane.dodds@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
West Tyrone	Nicola Brogan	Sinn Féin	nicola.brogan@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
West Tyrone	Daniel McCrossan	SDLP	daniel.mccrossan@mla.niassembly.gov.uk

Local MLAs below –

Constituency	Representative	Party	Email address
Upper Bann	Jonathan Buckley	DUP	jonathan.buckley@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
Upper Bann	Dolores Kelly	SDLP	dolores.kelly@mla.niassembly.gov.uk
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