

SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REPORT 2017

Membership

Church of Ireland

The Rt Rev Dr WP Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (Chairman – until March 2017)

Mrs Joan Bruton

Mr Edward Lindsay

Mrs Patricia O'Malley

Rev Brian O'Rourke

Ms Elizabeth Oldham

Mr Adrian Oughton

Mr. Geoffrey Perrin

The Presbyterian Church

Mrs Eleanor Petrie

Rev Stanley Stewart

The Methodist Church

Rev Nigel Mackey

Dr John Harris

The Religious Society of Friends

Vacant

Mr Nigel Pim

Secretary to the Board and to the Company

Dr. Ken Fennelly

Administrator (Grants Scheme)

Mr Johnny Honner

Secondary Education Committee

The Secondary Education Committee (SEC) is a corporate body comprising representatives from the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Religious Society of Friends.

The Committee derives its authority from a resolution passed by the sponsoring Churches in 1965.

The functions of the SEC are twofold. The distribution of a Block Grant provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to ensure necessitous Protestant children may attend Protestant secondary schools and the representation of the interests of the member churches in the post-primary education system.

The Committee operates as a limited company thus allowing both the corporate body and the liability of individual members to be appropriately insured, with members of the committee being simultaneously directors of the company.

The SEC meets five times annually (or as necessary). The SEC also has a Finance Sub-Committee which meets five times annually or more often as necessary.

The SEC and the DES have a Memorandum of Agreement in place with regard to the operation of the SEC Block Grant scheme. This Agreement is reviewed regularly and is due for consideration again in 2017. The SEC will continue to press the case for an increase in grant funding to facilitate the maximum number of children from Protestant families accessing Protestant second level schools.

#### Role of Chairman

It was with great regret that the Secondary Education Committee learned of the decision by the Committee Chairman, the Rt Rev Dr WP Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, to resign as chairman and from the SEC scheme. Bishop Colton has served on the SEC since January 2000 and was chairman for the majority of that time. This coincided with a period of challenge and change for the SEC, not least including the extreme financial pressure experienced by the SEC scheme. The Committee members and the administrative staff were extremely grateful for the steady hand that Bishop Colton brought as chairman during this period. He took an active and involved role in moving the status of the SEC onto a more formal footing: from its inception, the SEC had been essentially an ad hoc scheme, but this was formalised with the State by the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement. The members of the Committee of the SEC and the staff of the SEC are very grateful to the bishop for his tremendous commitment over such a long period of time and sincerely thank him for strong contribution he made. The bishop leaves the SEC in the knowledge that his strategic involvement in the work of the SEC has significantly contributed to building up the community of the Churches and has facilitated thousands of young people from a Protestant tradition in accessing a second-level education in their own ethos.

The resignation of the Bishop of Cork creates a vacancy in the Church of Ireland representation on the Committee. The General Synod of the Church of Ireland will elect a new member to replace Dr Colton at the 2017 meeting of the General Synod.

#### Block Grant Scheme

In the 2015/16 school year the audited accounts showed the total amount received from the DES, was €6,750,000 (€6,750,000), the grant in aid of fees totalled €6,459,807 (€6,503,267). The net cost of administering the SEC scheme was €155,956 (€141,633).

The following numbers of grants were awarded in respect of the 2016/17 school year: 1262 day grants (1,459), 811 boarding grants (862), in total 2,073 (2,321).

The Committee were able to maintain the grants for the school year 2016/17 on a scale for boarding from €957 to €7,629: day € 261 - €2,682.

## Administration

The office is under the management of the (company) secretary, Dr Ken Fennelly. Mr David Wynne retired from the role of Administrator at the end of July 2016. Mr Wynne had been in the role since 2003. Both the Committee and the schools assisted by the schools expressed their thanks and gratitude for all of Mt Wynne's work and dedication to the role over the past 13 years. The Committee wishes Mr Wynne a very happy retirement. In July 2016, Mr Johnny Honner was appointed to the post of Administrator and Ms Bridie McLaughlin was promoted to Deputy Administrator recognising her key role in the management of the grant scheme over many years. Mr Honner attended a number of open days at the request of schools and took the opportunity to discuss issues with parents. In terms of communications with schools and support for parents applying for the scheme, on-going consideration is being given as to how this might be improved; a website with an online applications facility and regular messaging to protestant managed primary schools. It is envisaged that such changes will bring a more consistent approach that will deliver the same information to all potential applicants, improve the processing of applications and will have a wider reach at an earlier point in decision cycle for parents considering where to send their children to secondary school. Mr Honner has initiated a number of operational upgrades to take account of changes in the governance and economic environments. Areas covered were I.T (hardware and software), application form revision, means test revision, all Protestant-managed primary schools were emailed an advert for school newsletter to parents.

In addition to the secretary, administrator and deputy administrator, a number of administrative support staff are engaged during the busy processing period and the Committee is grateful for all the hard work they put in during the intense period after the closing date for receipt of applications. The Committee is also grateful for the advice and assistance it receives throughout the year from its auditors Deloitte and in particular Mr. Patrick Murphy, Senior Manager, Deloitte.