

General Synod Board of Education, Northern Ireland (NI) Report 2026

AIMS

The current aims of the Board of Education NI are, to:

- Develop, in conjunction with other churches, a clear and shared vision of education shaped by core values of the Christian faith.
- Advise the Synod of developments in educational policy in NI and represent the Church as an educational partner to the Department of Education and other educational bodies.
- Liaise with other churches within the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) in promoting the interests and safeguarding the rights of transferors.
- Facilitate the nomination of transferor governors to controlled primary and post-primary schools.
- Make submissions to relevant government departmental consultations.
- Engage with the Education Authority, the Controlled Schools Support Council, and other sectoral bodies.
- Engage with Institutions of Higher Education regarding the future preparation of teachers for the Controlled sector.
- Seek, in conjunction with other churches, continued curriculum support of the RE core syllabus in schools.

Report

1. Current Issues

The Board of Education (NI) remains deeply concerned about the stress and weariness among principals, teachers, governors, and other staff in our current education system. Staff are dealing with increasing demands both physically and emotionally. The Board would ask Synod members to pray for all schools and for clergy to be present in their local schools as support for principals and their staff.

The Board of Education (NI) is still concerned by the voices in the media, politics and society which might question the role of faith in education. The Board believes that a school is best served by a non-denominational Christian ethos open to those of all faiths and none.

The Board of Education (NI) was disappointed in the result of JR87 in the Supreme Court but continues to support the TRC in the revision to the Religious Education curriculum in Northern Ireland. The Board of Education (NI) endorses the position that Collective Worship is a Christian act and is vital in the retention of a Christian ethos in all Controlled and Church of Ireland schools. The Board welcomes the review of the RE curriculum and supports Dr Hamill in his role representing the Church of Ireland on the Consultative Group in this process. The Board welcomes the Minister's plans to review the inspection process for Religious Education. The Board welcomes the TRC initiative of creating a Charter for all Christian organisations working in schools and fully endorses the use of the charter by schools.

The Board of Education (NI) is actively supporting schools in the nomination of the boards of governors and encourage all those who appoint governors to do so prayerfully and with wisdom. The Board wishes to thank all clergy who have nominated themselves and many other representatives to boards of local schools.

2. Education Authority (EA)

Special Educational Needs (SEN) Services provision continues to be central to the work of EA, given the exponential increase in the number of children and young people presenting with SEN in recent years. EA provided places for all children with SEN in September 2025. Work commenced in September 2025 to prepare places that will be required for children in September 2026. The number of children across Stages 2 and 3 projected as requiring a new or change of placement for September

2026, at October 2025, is 5,309. The demand for places in Special Schools and Specialist Provisions has increased from 6,930 in 2022/23 to 7,462 in 2024/25.

The pressure on all types of placements causes ongoing concern. This is as a result of the continual lack of availability of places, particularly in high demand areas of the province such as Belfast and Derry/Strabane. The estimated pressure across Special Schools and Specialist Provisions for September 2026 is for 943 additional places. The pressure is particularly prevalent for Nursery and Year 1 children.

A Controlled Schools Unit has been established within EA to provide dedicated support to schools of that management type. In terms of performance against the EA Business Plan 49 of 51 lines of work across six themes are on track for achievement by March 2026. Shared Education programmes continue with 134 partnerships involving 311 schools. Area Planning for the provision of school places currently has 85 workstreams as it seeks to deliver on the Department of Education sustainable Schools policy.

EA continues to work in a constrained financial environment. The Authority operated within its allocated budget in 2024/25. During the 2025/26 year the Authority continued to make efforts to live within budget and as a result a number of actions were implemented to accrue savings. It is projected that 71% of schools will have a financial deficit at the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

The Board wishes to thank Mr Ray Gilbert for his tireless work representing the Church of Ireland on the Board of the Education Authority.

3. Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)

TRC has held meetings with a range of key stakeholders in the education sector including the Minister of Education, Education Authority, Stranmillis College, Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC), Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Catholic Trustees Support Service, and Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. The TRC has also engaged with local political parties to ensure they keep education at the forefront of their policies.

The TRC continues its role at all levels of Area Planning including: the Department of Education Area Planning Strategic Group (APSG); the Area Planning Working Group (APWG); and the Area Planning Local Groups (APLG). Dr Hamill is the TRC representative on APSG, APWG, and APLG (southwest) and Mr Ian Bell is the TRC representative on the APLG (east).

The TRC continues to work with representatives from the Catholic Church to agree the conditions required for creating Jointly Managed Church Schools. There has been little progress on this area in the last year, and we still look for a suitable project to support.

The TRC would encourage all clergy and nominators to ensure that all Transferor Governors positions are filled with the best persons to serve our children and the schools they attend.

The TRC is chaired by Bishop Andrew Forster, and the four Church of Ireland representatives are Bishop Andrew Forster, Mr Ray Gilbert, Rev Catherine Simpson, and Dr Peter Hamill.

4. Controlled School Support Council

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is the advocacy body for Northern Ireland's controlled schools. Established in September 2016, it has gone from strength to strength and more than 95% of controlled Schools are members.

Dr Hamill is the Church of Ireland TRC representative on the CSSC Board. CSSC continues to raise the profile of the Controlled Sector, and the Board of Education (NI) is delighted with the impact

CSSC makes on schools and wider education issues.

The Minister of Education set up a Taskforce and following its report a special Controlled Schools Support unit has been set up in the Education Authority. A further public consultation has taken place, and the Minister is now working on the formation of a full Managing Authority for Controlled Schools (MACS) similar in role to CCMS. This MACS will require legislation through the Assembly, and it may not be possible to complete this in the current mandate. The TRC are exploring with the Minister exactly what the role for the Transferring Churches will be in this new body.

5. Funding Scheme

The Board of Education NI opened the funding scheme and had six applicants. All six grants were awarded to St Mark's (Portadown), Kilroot and Templecoran (Carrickfergus), Moneyreagh Parish (Belfast), Mullabrack and Kilcluney Group (Armagh Diocese), Shankill Parish (Lurgan), and Willowfield Parish (Belfast). Areas of work with parishes working closely with their local school included: P7 Transition, Book project, Self-esteem, Drama, and Risk.

6. Annual Theological Lecture

The annual theological lecture at Queens University took place in October and this new time of the year proved successful. The lecture was delivered by Professor John Wyatt on Autonomy, Suffering and Human Dignity: Theological and Medical Responses to Assisted Dying.

7. Church of Ireland Schools

The Board of Education NI acknowledges the amazing work of the Drelincourt School over so many years and its closure in August 25 marked the end of Church of Ireland primary education in Armagh. The Board wishes all the staff well in their future work and will support the Trustees of the school in finding a further educational use for the site.

Membership

The Board welcomed Rev Canon Terence Cadden as a new member following the resignation of Mrs Eileen Trew. Rev Canon Cadden is Chair of Governors of Seagoe Primary School, the one remaining Church of Ireland school in Northern Ireland.

The Board wishes to thank Dr Peter Hamill for his ongoing service and commitment to the Board.

General Synod Board of Education, Republic of Ireland (RI) Report 2026

A. Board of Education (RI)

AIMS

The aims of the General Synod Board of Education are to:

- Define the policy of the Church in education, both religious and secular and, in promotion of this policy, to take such steps as may be deemed necessary to co-ordinate activities in all fields of education affecting the interests of the Church of Ireland;
- Maintain close contact with Government, the Department of Education and Skills, Diocesan Boards of Education, and other educational and school authorities with a view to ascertaining the most efficient and economical use of resources including funds, transport facilities and teachers;
- Study any legislation or proposed legislation likely to affect the educational interests of the Church of Ireland and take such action with respect thereto as it may deem necessary;
- Deliberate and confer on all educational matters affecting the interests of the Church;
- Make such enquiries as it shall deem to be requisite and communicate with government authorities and all such bodies and persons as it shall consider necessary.

POWERS

- Shall have the power to represent the Board of Education of the General Synod in all educational matters applying solely to the Republic of Ireland;
- Will advise the General Synod of developments in educational policy in the Republic of Ireland and will represent the Church as an education partner with the Department of Education and Skills and other educational bodies;
- Support, through the *Follow Me* programme, religious education in primary schools under Protestant management;
- Provide support, training and advice to primary level patrons and boards of management;
- Undertake the processing of garda vetting applications for non-teaching employees and volunteers in Church of Ireland primary schools and employees and volunteers in parishes and other Church of Ireland organisations.

Executive Summary of Report:

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2. Fifty Years of Boards of Management: 1975-76 to 2025/26
3. Education Policy Development
4. Education Convention
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6. School Management Support and Advice
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9. Special Education and Special Classes
10. DEIS and DEIS Plus
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Appendix 1 Membership for Triennium 2025-2028

1. Personalia and Board Function

In January 2025, the Board welcomed Ms Helen McEntee, TD to the office of Minister for Education and Youth. The appointment of a new Minister (and government following the election in late 2024) brought about a change in the name, function and responsibilities of 'the Department' from the Department of Education and Skills to the Department of Education and Youth. The encompassing of 'youth' into the functions of the Department of Education has created an opportunity for the Church of Ireland to engage on that area of work in addition to primary and secondary education. The Board also congratulated Mr Michael Moynihan, TD, on his appointment as Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion. In December 2025, a cabinet reshuffle meant that Ms McEntee moved to be Minister for Foreign Affairs and Ms Hildegard Naughton, TD, was appointed Minister for Education and Youth. The Board congratulated Ms Naughton on her appointment and the new Minister acknowledged and thanked the Board for their kind wishes. Ms Naughton advised that she looked forward to engaging with the Board during her time in office as Minister for Education and Youth. The Board met four times (January, June, September and November) in hybrid format in 2025. The Board appointed two sub-committees during 2025. The attendance of members was recorded in the Minutes of the Board. The Board welcomed the Rev Canon John Clarke as member to fill a vacancy arising in the category of members elected by the dioceses. The term of office of the nominee from the Board to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) expired in 2025. The Board wishes to thank Mrs Joyce Perdue, retired principal of Rathfarnham NS, Dublin, most sincerely for her service on behalf of the Board and Church of Ireland schools on the NCCA. In accordance with the relevant procedure, the Board has sent forward a new

nominee to the NCCA for consideration by the Minister for Education and Youth for appointment in 2026. Further reports on the work of the Board are outlined in this Report (below).

The Minutes of the Board of Education RI were provided to PWC (Auditors of the RCB) in line with audit requirements. The annual accounts of the Board of Education RI were audited by PWC (Auditors of the RCB) as part of the RCB annual audit and were also provided to the Department of Education and Youth.

2. Fifty Years of Boards of Management: 1975/76 to 2025/26

The academic year 2025/26 marks fifty years since Boards of Management were introduced by Mr Dick Burke, TD, Minister for Education (1973-76). The introduction of Boards of Management marked a move to collective governance for schools and away from the ‘single manager’ model which had existed since the early decades of the National School system for education. The Board created a sub-committee in 2025 tasked with appropriately marking this significant anniversary in the history of Irish education. The sub-committee is focused on the end of the school year 2025/26 and will be in contact with both schools and dioceses in this regard.

The Board wishes to take this opportunity to thank all those who have served and continue to serve on Boards of Management and to recognise the important but often unseen work undertaken by Boards of Management.

3. Education Policy Development

The Board gave consideration to various education policy developments during its meetings in 2025.

A significant education policy development currently before the Oireachtas is the Parent and School Charter Bill. This Bill aims to give a stronger role to parents and students in the management of schools and will broaden the accountability of Boards of Management (primary and post-primary). The Bill also proposes the introduction of a complaints process for students which will therefore place such a complaints process on a legislative basis. The Board made observations on the text of the draft Bill and the Secretary engaged in a bi-lateral meeting with Department of Education and Youth officials to raise a number of concerns and seek clarification on various aspects of the Bill, on behalf of the Board. The draft Bill was subsequently amended to reflect some of these concerns.

During 2025, the Board reviewed the ‘Statement of Strategy’ published by the Department of Education and Youth which outlined the broad policy objectives for the Department. A number of observations raised by the Board on the implementation of various policies were subsequently advised to Department officials.

The Board welcomed the introduction of the new Primary Education Curriculum which was launched by the Minister for Education and Youth, noting that the new curriculum retains teaching time for the Patrons curriculum; a key element for schools under Church of Ireland Patronage since it is the only education sector where the Patrons programme is linked to school admissions process through legislation. As such, two pieces of legislation now support the role of the school Patron: the Education Act 1998 and the Admissions to School Act 2018 (in regards to the recognition of the Patrons programme for school admissions purposes).

The Board received advance briefings from the DEY in regards to revisions to the Child Protection Procedures for all schools and noted that the new procedures would require training to be provided for all members of Boards of Management on various aspects of the new procedures. In this connection, the Board also noted the publication of the ‘Scoping Inquiry’ into allegations of abuse in schools run by religious orders both boarding and day in late 2024 and the announcement by the Minister for Education and Youth to establish a Commission of Investigation into the handling of allegations or concerns of the abuse of children in all schools and all those in positions of authority (e.g. An Garda Síochána, the HSE, the Inspectorate and Department of Education) from 1927 to 2013. The Board was advised, in late 2025, that Mr Justice Michael McGrath (judge of the Court of Appeal) would chair the Commission of Investigation. In December 2025, Mr Justice McGrath announced his intention to begin the process of investigation by conducting a national survey among survivors and any persons with experiences relevant to the investigation. The Board wishes to express its support for the work of

the Commission of Investigation and is ever mindful of the devastation that the experience of abuse has on the life of a person.

4. Education Convention

In July 2025, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Helen McEntee, TD., announced her intention to launch a National Convention on Education which was described by the Minister as a ‘once in a generation opportunity for children, young people, parents, educators and wider society to help shape Ireland’s education system for decades to come’. Professor Anne Looney was appointed as chairperson of the Convention. It was announced that the Convention would run over four weekends in 2026. The Board is a recognised stakeholder in education and its representatives will participate in the deliberations of the Convention.

5. Advocacy on Issues:

The Board engages in an ongoing manner with the Department of Education through its participation in the ‘Primary Education Forum’. Ms Sarah Richards and the secretary attend the ‘Forum’ on behalf of the Board and Church of Ireland primary schools. The Forum is an opportunity to engage directly with Department of Education officials regarding all aspects of policy development and policy implementation.

On behalf of Church of Ireland Primary Schools, representations were made by the Board and education secretary on various issues facing schools. In particular, representations were made to the Department seeking to ‘slow the pace of change’ on new initiatives and new policy roll-outs. 2024/25 saw a high level of pace and sequence of change in the education system generally. The Board sought assurances from the Department of a recognition of this pace of change in the coming school year and has formally requested that adequate time, space, resources and scope for leadership be given to ensure effective implementation of initiatives already in the system.

Representations were also made (and will continue to be made) regarding adequate funding for schools; along with reiterating again the need for the advance publication of schedule of payments for school funding. In this regard, a formal submission was made to the Department regarding ‘Budget 2026’ and which was followed up by in-person meetings with the Minister for Education and Youth and political spokespersons on education. The submission made by the Board is available to read on the education section of the Church of Ireland website and the lobbying return for various meetings in this regard is available to view on www.lobbying.ie.

The Board also has representation on the ‘teacher supply’ working group within the Department of Education and Youth which is tasked by the Minister to look at ‘creative solutions’ in regards to addressing teacher shortages.

6. School Management Support and Advice

While the role of the Board is to review, consider educational policy development and general strategic engagement on behalf of the Church in the field of education, the secretariat has an additional role in providing close advice and support to primary schools under Church of Ireland Patronage. Funding is provided to the Board in this regard and is applied (through the RCB) to the support of the education secretary role and that of the education advisor through a ‘strategic partnership’ with the CPSMA for school support services. In 2025 over 2,000 enquires for support and advice (by phone or email) to primary school leaders and Board chairpersons. This service is highly valued as it allows the staff of the Board to keep in close contact with operational matters at school level and is essential to the Board fulfilling its function as the management body for Church of Ireland primary schools.

Garda Vetting Update

The Board of Education/Safeguarding Office carries out Garda Vetting for ancillary staff and volunteers in Church of Ireland primary schools. In 2025, 2775 applications were processed in respect of primary schools. The Board wishes to thank Mr Alex Kinch, Ms Chiara de Raffaele and Mrs Sarah Mac Bruithin for their work in the Garda Vetting Unit RI. This work is part funded by the Department of Education and Youth.

7. Patronage Support

The role of the school patron has developed significantly over the past number of decades. Where once, a school patron could devolve much of the responsibilities and management oversight to school Boards of Management, the increase in both regulation and the codification of practice with regard to governance, financial oversight, child protection has seen a consequent increase in the work involved in performing the role of school patron. For the majority of primary schools under Church of Ireland patronage, the school patron is the bishop of the diocese.

Following discussions with between the Board, the episcopal patrons at primary level and the RCB, it was agreed that a new support function would be created to specifically support the work of school Patrons. In this regard, Mrs Christine Cody was appointed as Patronage Support Officer, responsible to the bishops of the Church of Ireland who hold Patronage at primary level.

8. Follow Me RE Curriculum Developments

The first two parts of the Follow Me programme were published in digital format in 2025 after a launch and presentation at General Synod by Dr Jacqui Wilkinson (series editor). Designed as slide decks for 3rd and 4th classes to replace the previous teachers' manuals, the digital lessons have been very well received in primary schools. Inservice training was provided for teachers by Ms Carolyn Good and Dr Jacqui Wilkinson in September 2025. The Second phase of the project is well underway and a team of teachers worked on developing slide decks for 1st and 2nd classes in 2025. These are planned to be edited, piloted and published for schools to purchase for September 2026. Sales are managed through the Follow Me website www.followme.ie, which also contains RE related resources for primary schools.

Music is inextricably linked with Anglican worship and the pipe organ plays a symbiotic part in the making of music for Anglican worship and liturgy in the majority of Church of Ireland parishes and cathedrals. One new resource available on the website, with supporting lesson resources, is a new video entitled 'Pulling out all the stops', which seeks to introduce pupils in schools to the distinctive musical tradition in the worship and liturgical life of the Church of Ireland. This video was commissioned by Follow Me and is an introduction to the organ of St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork. It was created by Mr Peter Stobart, Director of Music at St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork and was filmed and directed by Fuchsia Fishbourne (MainFrame TV). The Board wishes to thank Mr Stobart, Mr Matthew Breen, Assistant Director of Music at St Fin Barre's, Cork and the staff and pupils of St Fin Barre's National School, Cork who participated in the video on the introduction to the pipe organ.

The video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/qGufu79g7uM>.

The Board continues to be grateful to Dr Wilkinson and Ms Good for their ongoing work on the Follow Me curriculum and to the Rev Prof Canon Anne Lodge, chair of the Religious Education sub-committee. The Board also wishes to thank all the primary teachers who undertook to review lessons for inclusion in the new slide deck resources.

9. Special Education and Special Classes

A major feature in the development of educational provision in 2025 was the announcement of funding for schools to open special classes. Over 400 special classes were sanctioned at primary level for the school year 2025/26, bringing the total number of special classes in all primary schools to over 2,338 and 997 at post primary level. This represents a major investment in special education by Government since the cost of staffing one special class with a teacher and two SNA's amounts to €160,000 (Source: Dáil (PQ 174) 1st October 2024). The ability to open a special class varies from school to school. In many instances, while a school may wish to open a special class, factors such as restrictions on available space or access will curtail a school's ability to do so. During 2025, the secretariat of the board maintained close contact with the Social Inclusion Section of the Department of Education and Youth to determine the ability of Church of Ireland primary schools to open special classes. The most recent data in this regard (at 31st December 2025) is that 19 Church of Ireland primary schools were approached in 2025 by the NCSE to open a special class, with four agreeing to do so and eleven

indicated that they were not in a position to do so, while a further four are in negotiations with the NCSE. The Board understands that opening a special class is a major decision for a school in terms of both the use of internal space and the work involved in setting up a class. However, the Board encourages schools to open special classes where possible, mindful that not only is inclusion a necessity in the provision of education but goes to the heart of the Christian ethos of the school.

10. Deis and Deis Plus (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)

Minister McEntee has announced a new DEIS Plan for schools which is to be developed through consultation with a range of stakeholders, primarily including DEIS schools. The Minister has also announced her intention to develop a DEIS Plus scheme which will focus on schools with the highest levels of disadvantage with a target of early intervention and to seek to consolidate various educational and community services in a focused way in schools with acute disadvantage. The Board has been advised by the Department that this scheme is currently at end point design with the intention of bringing it forward for Ministerial approval by December 2025. The number of schools under Church of Ireland/Protestant primary patronage which are part of the DEIS scheme is thirty-three and which represents a significant number of the total number of Church of Ireland/Protestant primary schools. The Rev Canon Professor Anne Lodge engaged in a number of meetings with the DEY on behalf of Board in regards to research basis of the DEIS scheme and the implementation of the extension of the DEIS scheme.

11. Board of Management Training (Primary)

Board of Management training was provided for schools on the topic of ‘Legal Issues and Risk’ in the Autumn of 2025 in the following dioceses: Cashel, Ferns and Ossory (CFO), Meath and Kildare, Dublin and Glendalough and for Cork, Cloyne and Ross diocese in early 2026 (which also marked the retirement of Bishop Paul Colton as a school patron at primary level). These training seminars were provided in partnership with Ecclesiastical Insurances and the Board thanks EIO for their involvement and support in providing these events.

12. ‘Small Schools’ Administrative Cluster Initiative – Action Research Project

The ‘Small Schools’ Administrative Cluster initiative is now in its fifth year. This project involves schools clustering together (usually four schools) with an administrator shared between the schools in the cluster. The intention is to support smaller rural schools administratively and to lessen the administrative workload on teaching principals. Four primary schools in Donegal are participating in the project. In May 2024, the Minister announced that the project would be extended for a further three years and also announced that the project would form the basis for research on supports for small rural schools in both an Irish and European context. The project is supported by OIDE with a small school’s project co-ordinator. The project has proved a success with Church of Ireland primary schools in the cluster and the extension of the project was welcomed by the Board. Further information can be found at: www.smallschoolsproject.com

13. Second Level School Matters

While many of the education policy issues considered by the board over the past year were of common interest for both primary and post primary alike, a number of issues are of particular relevance to Church of Ireland and Protestant post primary schools and the Board wishes to highlight the following items in that regard.

From September 2025 the redevelopment of the senior cycle curriculum begun with the redevelopment of the subjects in the first tranche and will continue to be rolled out over the next few years. Teachers in the first tranche of subjects have undergone a series of in-service days in regards to the implementation of the redeveloped subjects and this will continue on with the roll-out of the redevelopment of the senior cycle curriculum. In this connection, the Board notes that while the TUI has agreed to senior cycle redevelopment (on the basis of achieving a range of outcomes) the ASTI, through a ballot of members, has not agreed to the implementation of senior cycle redevelopment and is advancing its disagreement through the relevant dispute resolution mechanisms. A number of Church of Ireland post primary schools have teaching staff with both TUI and ASTI members.

The lack of availability of teachers for certain subject areas continues to cause difficulties for both secondary and comprehensive schools in inhibiting the ability of schools to offer full curriculum subject provision (in particular practical subjects). Schools in the Dublin area report that the cost of accommodation is an extenuating factor in sourcing teachers at post primary level. The Board is aware that this issue has been raised at national level by both school management bodies and the teacher unions. The long-term effect of this lack of teachers to teach specific subjects should be a serious cause of concern for Government. In regards to classroom management, while the introduction of pouches for student mobile phones was greeted with some derision on their introduction, school leaders have advised that the introduction of mobile phone pouches have had a positive impact on school life.

Church of Ireland and Protestant post primary schools are committed to inclusion and supporting students with special needs. It should be noted however that where a school is fee-charging it is precluded from receiving special needs resources and supports from the State even where the school waives fees for those students. This seems to be an anomaly in the allocation model of special needs provision and indicates to special needs students that they have less recognition from the State in attending a school of their own ethos than students in the majority of other schools.

In 2025, the Department of Education and Youth announced a pilot scheme regarding the management of applications which involves parents in a specific area filling out one application form for all schools in their local area. The provisions in this pilot scheme have caused some concern for Church of Ireland and Protestant post primary school leaders in regards to the ability of parents to express a single choice (i.e. for a school of their own ethos) and in regards to how applications for boarding places might be treated in the common admissions system. It is recognized that, at this point, this is a pilot scheme which can be amended and developed based on the outcome of the experiences of the pilot scheme. It is also noted however that the common admissions scheme is simply an administrative tool and will not provide any extra school places in areas experiencing acute shortages of school places.

The report from the SEC is included below, but in this connection, it should be highlighted that the schools which are part of the SEC scheme and receive capitation funding from that scheme, continue to be treated by the State as ‘private’ schools. This means that, since 2009, they have received a lower level of resourcing and funding and are excluded from a range of Department of Education and Youth schemes and programmes. This situation continues to impact on Church of Ireland and Protestant parents and can act as disincentive for parents to choose a school of their own ethos for their children’s second level education.

The Board congratulates Mount Temple Comprehensive, Dublin on the commencing of building works on a new school building to accommodate up to 1,200 students which is due for completion in early 2027.

The Board notes a number of new senior management appointments in Church of Ireland/Protestant post primary level schools and congratulates the following on their appointment as principal during 2025:

- Mr David Bane, Mount Temple Comprehensive School, Dublin.
- Mr Tim Hicks, East Glendalough Comprehensive School, Wicklow
- Mr Noel Cunningham, Wilsons Hospital School, Multyfarnham, Co. Westmeath

And for the school year of 2024/25:

- Mr Brian Moore, Wesley College, Dublin
- Mr Alan Cox, Rathdown School, Dublin
- Ms Deborah Crean, Temple Carrig Secondary School, Greystones, Wicklow.

14. SEC – Annual Report

The SEC is an independent company, initially established by General Synod in 1965, which is fully funded by the Department of Education and Youth, through an agreement relating to the payment of capitation funding dating back to 1968 and continues to provide financial support to second level students who are of a Protestant denomination. Over sixty Protestant denominations are currently recognised for grant eligibility purposes. In 2023/24 €5.942 million in grant support was paid to approximately 1,285 recipients. 52% of recipients are in band 1, meaning that those recipients have an income that is either derived from social welfare or equivalent levels. The members of Committee are nominated by the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) and elected to serve as directors of the SEC (clg) at the AGM of the SEC.

Mr Gavin Woods was elected as Chairman of the SEC in 2025, succeeding Mrs Hazel Corrigan, Honorary Secretary of the General Synod. Dr Ken Fennelly is the Company Secretary of the SEC. The reporting requirements of the SEC changed in 2019. Where before the annual report was provided to the General Synod, the annual report of the SEC is now provided to the Department of Education in the first instance and is published on its website at www.secgrant.ie in July each year.

15. Church of Ireland Centre, DCU – Update 2025

The core work of the Church of Ireland Centre (CIC), DCU is the care of its Bachelor of Education students and the delivery of their B.Ed. pathway. The CIC delivers key components to students on the CIC B.Ed. pathway including the RE Certificate in Teaching the Follow Me programme; Religious Studies modules; the Small Schools specialism modules. Students on the CIC B.Ed. pathway undertake most of their placements in schools under Church of Ireland / Reformed Christian patronage. The Director of CIC reviews all applicants commencing the Centre's B.Ed. pathway annually to ensure their eligibility in line with the derogation to the Employment Equality Act.

CIC provides a part-time hybrid course on the Follow Me programme for teachers working in Church of Ireland schools. 29 teachers successfully completed the course led by Dr Jacqui Wilkinson in 2025. This course is supported by the General Synod Board of Education. The 2025 course included webinars for schools on RE and neurodivergence with Dr Claire O'Neill and on RE and Art delivered by Dr Wilkinson.

CIC liaises with primary schools under Church of Ireland and other Reformed Christian patronage through school placement for its students. It also provides supports, engages in research and policy support and disseminates a biannual Newsletter. In late May, Prof Geraldine O'Connor and Rev Canon Prof Anne Lodge engaged in a consultation exercise with schools in the Dublin area about changes to the operation of the final-year B.Ed. placement. In September, CIC and DCU bade farewell to Prof O'Connor who retired after decades of service, much of it spent organising school placement. CIC is very grateful to Prof O'Connor for her dedication to this role and is delighted that she will stay connected with CIC. Her replacement, Ms Laura O'Sullivan (who had worked alongside Prof. O'Connor) was appointed at the end of December.

On 10th June, CIC welcomed a delegation of teachers and clergy from the Anglican Diocese of Chota Nagpur in India and hosted a seminar about denominational education provision in Ireland and India. On 27th November, CIC organised its second annual Advent Schools' service in the DCU All Hallows' Chapel. This was attended by 12 primary schools, and their bishop, from around Dublin that regularly host our B.Ed. students. Music was led by the choir of Kill o the Grange National School and the address was given by the rector Rev Canon Alan Breen.

Dr Wilkinson and Rev Canon Prof Lodge presented at a General Synod Board of Education event for new principals on 17th January. Rev Canon Prof Lodge presented on small school leadership priorities at the ESAI Conference in Athlone on 10th April. Dr Wilkinson presented at the ISREV conference in Riga in July on the Follow Me programme and its place within the primary curriculum. Dr Wilkinson published an article entitled: 'Assessing the influence of the home in sustaining church attendance in Anglican children attending Anglican primary schools in the Republic of Ireland' in the Journal of Beliefs & Values. Rev Canon Prof Lodge

published an article entitled: ‘The beauty of the place and the beauty of the liturgy: exploring the mission and ministry of Christ Church Cathedral Dublin’, using an Anglican ethos assessment tool, also in the Journal of Beliefs and Values. Both are freely available through an open-access arrangement.

16. Conclusion

The marking of fifty years of Boards of Management provides an important moment of reflection on the evolution of school governance in Ireland. The Board acknowledges with gratitude the commitment of those who serve on Boards of Management, whose voluntary work underpins the stability, accountability and ethos of our schools. In that regard, the Board commissioned commemorative plaques which were presented to school Boards of Management over the past few months to mark the anniversary and to thank Board members for all they do for our school communities. The Board continues to be grateful to the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU in the development of the ‘Follow Me’ RE curriculum.

Throughout the past year, the Board has engaged with the Department of Education and Youth, and various other State agencies, to seek increased resources and to inform policy development from the perspective of Church of Ireland school leaders and Boards of Management. However, the Board wishes to note that in many instances the timeframes provided by the Department of Education and Youth and other State agencies for providing observations on draft policies can be very short. Often only a few working days are provided, making it impossible for the Board or the secretariat to engage in consultations with school boards, patrons and other relevant stakeholders.

The past year in education was characterised by two key developments at national level: the announcement of a National Convention on Education which will meet over four weekends in 2026/27. The Board looks forward to participating in the National Convention in the coming year. The second key development in 2025/2026 was the increased provision for special education classes. The Board wishes to reiterate its commitment to encouraging special education provision and inclusion, wherever possible, in Church of Ireland schools.

In conclusion, the Board wishes to thank the secretary to the Board, Dr Ken Fennelly and the education advisor, Mrs Susan Ellis, for their ongoing work in supporting the Board and schools.

THE GENERAL SYNOD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERSHIP

(from 31st March 2025 – 31st March 2028)

THE ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS (Ex Officio)

THE HONORARY SECRETARIES OF THE GENERAL SYNOD (Ex Officio):

Rev Canon G Wharton

Mr K Gibson

Ms H Corrigan

Rev Canon M Kingston

Elected members: 2 from each diocese (one clerical and one layperson):

Armagh

Rev Canon M Kingston

Mr T Flannagan

Clogher

Rev L Capper

Ms R Barton

Derry and Raphoe

Rev Canon H Gilmore

Mr D West

Mrs A Reid

Down and Dromore

Rev C Simpson

Mrs D Cheshire

Connor

Rev P Jones

Mr R Gilbert

Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh

Very Rev N Crossey

Vacant

Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe

Rev S Cousins

Mrs M Brickenden

Dublin and Glendalough

The Rev S Hanily

Mr J Aiken

Meath and Kildare

Rev Canon JDM Clarke

Mr T Smith

Cashel Ferns and Ossory

Rev Canon H Oxley

Mrs M Jacob

Cork, Cloyne and Ross

Ven A Orr

Mr P Stobart

Co-opted members: (including 9 representatives of teachers) along with NI Board nominees:

1. *Vacant* (CIPSMA)
2. Very Rev N Sloane (Sunday School Society)
3. Rev Canon Prof A Lodge (Third Level)
4. Dr E Gash (ISA)
5. Mr N Barrett (ISA)
6. Mr A Forrest (ISA)
7. Mr K Sparling (ASTI)
8. Mrs S Hall (ASTI)
9. Mr D Duffy (TUI)
10. Ms S Richards (PSCICE)
11. Ms R Frazer (PSCICE)
12. *Vacant* (PSCICE)
13. Mr L Hawkins (CIYD)
14. Mr S Henry (CIYD)
15. Rev A Adams
16. Mr M Johnston
17. Miss F Boyd
18. Mr R McLoughlin, OBE.
19. Mr I Bell
20. Prof N Purdy, OBE (to February 2026)

Observers:

Dr R Stevenson

(Presbyterian Church)

Ms D Wood

(Methodist Church)

In Attendance:

Dr PJ Hamill, Secretary NI

Mrs S Ellis, Education Advisor

GENERAL SYNOD BOARD OF EDUCATION - EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (2026-27)

Archbishop of Armagh
The Archbishop of Dublin
Rev Canon M Kingston
Hon Secretary RI
Rev C Simpson
Mr T Flannagan
Mr R McLaughlin, OBE
Ms S Richards
Mr A Forrest
Mrs M Brickenden

BOARD OF EDUCATION (REPUBLIC OF IRELAND) (2025-28)

Ex officio members:

The Archbishop of Dublin (Chair)
Honorary Secretaries – Rev Canon GV Wharton, Ms H Corrigan

Elected by House of Bishops:

Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry (Deputy Chair)
Bishop of Clogher

Diocesan Representatives: Rev Canon J Clarke, Mrs M. Brickenden
Post primary representatives: Mr A Forrest, Mr K Sparling
Third level representatives: Rev Canon Prof A Lodge
Primary representatives: Ms S Richards, Rev Canon H Gilmore

CIYD representative: Mr L Hawkins
Sunday School Society: Very Rev N Sloane

Co-options GS BOE: none

Observers:

Dr R Stevenson
(Presbyterian Church)
Ms D Wood
(Methodist Church)
Secretary, Board of Education (Republic of Ireland)
Dr K Fennelly, Church of Ireland House, Church Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin 6

In Attendance:

Dr P Hamill, Church of Ireland House, Donegal St, Belfast, NI.
Mrs S Ellis, Education Advisor

BOARD OF EDUCATION (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Members:

Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev FJ McDowell (Chair)

Bishop of Derry, Rt Rev A Forster

Rev M Kingston (Clerical Hon Sec)

Mr K Gibson (Lay Hon Sec)

Elected members:

ARMAGH Rev M Kingston

Mr T Flannagan

CLOGHER Rev P Thompson (Board of Education only)

Mrs R Barton

CONNOR Rev Dr A Campbell (Board of Education only)

Mr R Gilbert

DERRY *Vacant*

Mrs A Reid

DOWN Rev C Simpson

Mrs D Cheshire (on Board as co-opted member)

Co-opted members:

Mrs R Forde

Mr M Johnston

Miss F Boyd

Mrs E Trew (till Sept 25)

Prof N Purdy, OBE (to February 2026)

Mr I Bell

Mr R McLoughlin, OBE

Canon T Cadden (joined Nov 25)

CIYD representative:

Mr S Henry

Honorary Secretary, Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

Vacant

Honorary Treasurer, Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

Mr M Johnston

Secretary, Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

Dr PJ Hamill, Church of Ireland, Floor 2, 18-22 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA