CEIST Submission on the DES Discussion Paper on a Regulatory Framework for School Enrolment Respondent’s Details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal [   ]  On behalf of an organisation [ X ]

Submission date: October 28th, 2011.

1. Introduction
1.1 Catholic education has a long & distinguished history in Ireland, with the schools of various congregations operating very successfully over several centuries.

1.2 Five Catholic Religious congregations engaged in Post-Primary education for more that three and a half centuries (Daughters of Charity; the Mercy Sisters; Missionaries of the Sacred Heart; Sisters of the Christian Retreat and the Presentation Sisters), established the CEIST Trust in 2007.

1.3 The legal framework for Trusteeship is encompassed within the Education Act (1998) & the Trust provides a new moral and legal framework enabling its schools to continue to offer Post-Primary Catholic education into the future as a viable option and as an integral part of the Irish school system.

1.4 CEIST welcomes the consultative process undertaken by the Minister and agrees with the basic premise that “Ensuring equality of educational opportunity is the objective of all civilised societies”. The key objective is indeed laudable when it informs us that a new regulatory framework “…for school enrolment is to provide a statutory basis that can better ensure that school’s enrolment policies and procedures are non discriminatory and are applied fairly in respect of all applicants”.

The CEIST trust Board are in support of the views as expressed by the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) and as articulated by the Association for the Management of Catholic Schools (AMCSS), but proffer below its own specific observations, in addition to those presented by our associated bodies.

2. **Diversity.**

2.1 While the discussion paper states “The enrolment policies and practices that served schools and parents well in the past may not now fully accommodate the needs and diversity of our modern society”, it is important to equally acknowledge that because of modern, social exigencies, incremental change has become the order of the day over the past ten years, especially in the schools where oversubscription is the norm. Boards of Management annually review & renew their Policies having regard for the needs of the particular school community which a school serves, legislation and the fundamental principles of inclusivity.

2.2 The Catholic school is an inclusive community, formed by the interaction with and collaboration of its various components; students, parents, teachers, non-teaching staff and members of the Board of Management.

3. **Communication.**

3.1 A number of guiding principles and legislation inform the provision of Catholic education as a viable choice to parents, not least of which is the right and obligation, to manage its affairs subject to the common good.

3.2 School Admissions Policies are already formulated within the context of the Education Act (1998) and are a good example of Boards of Management and Patrons working
collaboratively towards the ensuing publication of the school Admissions Policy, with the agreement of the Patron. (Education Act, 15-2 (d)).

3.3 Communication of information is critical to the success of every enterprise, in particular the educational enterprise. While the onus is on the Boards of Management to publicise policies, adhere to structures etc. there should be a similar onus on parents, in turn, to fully appraise the school of all information.

3.4 We support the practice of publishing as much information as possible about the school, however it must be acknowledged that all schools do not enjoy equality of resourcing and therefore cannot be expected to spend money on public advertisements if they cannot afford it. Therefore, regulating the publication cannot be introduced without equalization of funding across the sectors.

4. **Section 29 Appeals.**

4.1 Having regard for Section 29 of the Education Act (1998), a number of issues arise. The current system places a very heavy administrative burden on all concerned, with instances of schools having to attend multiple hearings for what is effectively the same case, albeit with ultimate success due to the school’s adherence to its enrolment policy. In such cases, having regard for minimizing considerable expense and effective time management, at the very least is a need for change of implementation as opposed to change of legislation per se.

4.2 Where an appeal under Section 29 of the Act is upheld, we must emphasise the importance of a multi-agency approach when implementing the outcome, thereby enabling the student to participate positively, and benefit from, an education programme within a mainstream or other educational establishment, with dignity.

5. **Characteristic Spirit.**

5.1 CEIST welcomes the proposal to retain the Faith-based criteria as part of an Admissions Policy. Schools (Boards of Management and Patrons) must also have some flexibility in setting out other criteria which are connected to its traditions and ethos, for example siblings, past pupils, parish etc., criteria which in most instances would not result in a school filling all its available spaces.

5.2 The Education Act outlines the responsibility of the Board of Management to exercise its role and responsibility with regard to upholding and being accountable to the patron for so upholding the characteristic spirit of the school. The characteristic spirit of each school is a central feature of its educational philosophy, underpins every action and informs the learning environment of the school.

5.3 It is a central tenet of schools within the CEIST community that students of all faiths and none are welcome. The Guidelines on Inclusivity (Aiveen Mullally/JMB 2010) set out the position of Catholic schools in this regard.
Having regard for the aforementioned, parents would be asked to respect and actively support the ethos of the school as part of the admissions procedure.

6. **Compliance.**

6.1 Compliance with legislation is a reasonable expectation, however, it seems excessive to remove the powers of the Board in the area of Enrolment and replace it with an Enrolment/Admissions Officer. Boards exist through generous, voluntary commitment, and to remove some of their powers would be tantamount to undermining the Board in its entirety.

7. **Application Process.**

7.1 The Trust recognizes the importance and value of timescales for enrolment. We suggest that, coinciding with the standardized school year, consideration be given to a standardized timeframe for enrolment and that agreement on same be arrived at amongst the partners in education.

7.2 With regard to the implementation of Admissions Policies, a standardized time-frame and a common application form have the potential to be beneficial to all. Such a system would have to be negotiated nationally, with the education partners, including school Patrons.

8. **Voluntary contributions.**

8.1 CEIST believes that an application for admission to school can never be conditional on the payment of a financial contribution. The system of requesting a voluntary contribution can only pertain when a place is offered and is in agreement with the principles espoused on same in the discussion document.

8.2 In conclusion, having regard for upholding the core values of the Trust and our obligations to Church and State for the educational enterprise, we seek to act justly and responsibly in all our relationships and welcome the consultative process in order to arrive at a much welcome Regulatory Framework.

Anne Kelleher, CEO.
CEIST Ltd.