

June 8th, 2016

Re: New Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018

Dear Minister,

I am making a submission on the new 3-year strategy for the Department of Education and Skills as an Independent TD for Donegal and would like to take the opportunity to thank you for this opportunity as part of a wider consultation process.

Equality in Education

My priority in my second term as an Independent TD is to campaign for greater equality proofing of Government policies. While I support the organisations' submissions focusing on equality in all aspects of Department policy, I will focus on the issue of equality in education and would urge the Minister to prioritise this in the new 3-year strategy.

Furthermore I would urge the Minister to consider taking the political cycle out of policy development with a view to developing a child-centred Department strategy with a vision that goes beyond the cycle of the current Government term. The best interests of the child must remain paramount in the formation of a new strategy and must be a primary focus in our education system. Our education system needs to reflect the diversity that exists across Ireland and within our communities.

Schools which use religion in their admissions policies, which prioritise baptised children over the non-religious and schools which do not teach diversity in their curriculum are not reflecting a modern, more inclusive Ireland. We also need to provide diversity and choice for parents meaning more schools with multi or non-denominational platforms must be prioritised.

I wish to reiterate the priorities as set out by Equate Ireland and which are summarised below:

- **A strategy for Diversity and Choice in our schools**
- **New school admissions legislation which includes amendment of section 7.3 (c) of the Equal Status Act 2000 so that children are not discriminated against on religious grounds for school admission.**
- **Department of Education issued guidelines for all schools to follow so that children can opt-out of religious classes and access appropriate alternatives.**
- **Planning for the increase to 400 non- and multi-denominational schools by 2030.**

- **Implementation of The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism recommendation for a protocol for an inclusive school accompanied by a programme of continuous professional development training on the protocol for teachers.**
- **Religious instruction is moved to a discreet time of school day or outside of curriculum hours.**
- **Policy and legislation which allow religious instruction to happen during the school day are repealed. This would include Sections 9 (d), 15 (2) (c) and 30 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998.**

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Pringle', written in a cursive style.

Thomas Pringle T.D.