

## **Minister Quinn launches Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector**

The Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairi Quinn TD, today officially launched the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.

Addressing an audience of education stakeholders, Minister Quinn said the Forum “is a key objective of the Programme for Government for the education sector and I wanted it to get underway as quickly as possible.”

Professor John Coolahan (Chair), Dr. Caroline Hussey and Ms. Fionnuala Kilfeather have been appointed as members of the independent Advisory Group. They will receive and assess the various views and perspectives submitted including those of parents, patrons, teachers and the wider community. The Group will then provide the Minister with policy advice within the Terms of Reference of the Forum.

The Minister called for submissions on a number of specific themes:

- Establishing parental and community demand for diversity
- Managing the transfer / divesting of patronage
- Diversity within a school or small number of schools in a locality

Details of these themes and of the arrangements for submissions are available on the Department’s website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Referring to the context of the Forum, Minister Quinn noted “the significant societal changes that have taken place in Ireland in recent years have led to an increased demand for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational schooling as well as increased demand for Irish language schooling. There are real questions to be answered about the match between our type of school provision, the demand for greater diversity and the make-up of the communities which need to be served.”

The Advisory Group will analyse and evaluate the submissions received. It will then convene a conference in the autumn to present its interim report.

Chair of the Forum, Professor John Coolahan stressed that parental and children’s rights are a bedrock principle of its work.

“Pluralism in education was the first principle enunciated in the Government White Paper of 1995 and it has been endorsed by the National Education Conference. Rather than being a threat to existing practice, true pluralism is an enrichment for society and its promotion is urged by key thinkers on modern Irish Education,” said Professor Coolahan.

Minister Quinn said that “there is clearly both a broad agenda for change and a broad openness to change. The key issue that the Forum will address is how change can be brought about.”

In the context of the constraints imposed by the current economic climate, the Minister emphasised the need to make maximum use of existing school infrastructure in catering for future demands and to arrive at cost-neutral solutions.

In undertaking its work, the Forum will take particular account of the expressed willingness of the Catholic Church to consider divesting patronage of primary schools.

The Minister noted that into the future “what we want are strong schools that provide good quality education to current and future generations of pupils.”

“I want this Forum to produce a clear road map that every citizen can follow. We will produce practical solutions that will work over time,” he concluded.

Interested parties are invited to make their submissions to the Forum by 7<sup>th</sup> June.

The Forum is expected to present its final report to the Minister by the end of the year.

Ends