



**Affiliated to the International Humanist and Ethical Union
Member of the European Humanist Federation**

Submission to: Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton T.D.

Subject: “The role of denominational religion in the school admissions process and possible approaches for making changes.”

From: The Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI)

20th March 2017

The Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI) is an organisation whose aims are the promotion of the ideals of Humanism and the assurance of equality of rights and parity of esteem for those citizens of Ireland who do not subscribe to a religion. Humanism is a positive ethical philosophy of life based on concern for humanity in general and for individuals in particular. It is a view of life for those people who base their understanding of existence on the evidence of the natural world and its evolution, and which combines reason with compassion and empathy. The rapidly changing diversity of Irish society, in particular in matters of religion and society’s secular outlook, is a reality.

The Humanist Association of Ireland calls for equal access to all schools and equal respect within schools for all children.

HAI Response to the Ministers four possible approaches.

1. Catchment area

The Humanist Association recommends an independent state authority - managed independently of the school patrons - to decide upon standardised catchment areas for schools based on the educational needs of the country.

Gaeilscoileanna and special schools would also have catchment areas assigned to them which would overlay the network of National schools catchment areas. This independent state authority would also manage school admissions e.g. the Central Applications Office based on standardised admission policy and catchment areas.

2. Nearest school rule

All children should have equal access to their nearest State-funded school.

3. Quota system

State-funded school should be open to all children and religion should not be a factor in accessing state funded services.



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4. Outright prohibition

- i. The Humanist Association supports the outright **repeal** of section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act in respect of publicly-funded primary schools.
- ii. Publicly funded schools should not show preference to any one religion and all children should have equal access and equal respect within the school. Even if the school patron is not a religion, the school ethos can be religious, examples can be found in the Model schools and the Minister for Education and Skills as patron and at second level where the Education and Training Boards (ETB) are patron of designated religious ethos schools.
- iii. Publicly funded schools should not show preference to any one religion and all children should have equal access and equal respect within the school. Not all minorities have a school or schools. Currently the existence of non-denominational schools is an open question.

Specific issues

- A. Possible impacts on minority religions

The state should not to endow any religion be it in the majority or a minority.

- B. Possible constitutional issues

Policy and legislation should be kept in step with an evolving Irish society and the secularisation of policy and legislation is a way to treat all religious and non-religious equally in the provision of state services & funding.

- C. Possible impacts on the management/administration of individual primary schools/ of a primary school system of 3200 schools

When the state and state agencies act as school patrons their admission policies and ethos should not favour any religion or religions. An example of this is the Model schools with the Minister for Education and Skills as patron.

- D. Possible unintended impacts on other goals of Education Policy

While both Gaeilscoileanna and special schools deliver education differently to the majority of schools, their religious ethos should not be a barrier nor should it act in a discriminatory way to children who are not of that school's religious ethos.



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Synopsis

The Humanist Association calls for an end to religious discrimination in State-funded schools. The only approach offered by the Minister for Education and Skills, that would remove the 'baptism barrier' is **approach 4 sub option (i)** – all of the other approaches and sub-options allow for discrimination on the basis of religion in access to taxpayer-funded schools.

This submission is made on behalf of the HAI by:

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Humanist Association of Ireland

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