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cc PS/Tony Worthington (DENI)  
Secretary  
Mr D Hill (O/R)  
Mr McVeigh  
~~Mr Russell~~

MR TARGET  
TO SEE T PA.  
WITH THE BREFING  
FOLDER. 22/8

Tony Worthington met with a delegation from Gaeloiliuint (GO) on Thursday 21 August 1997 to discuss Irish Medium issues. The following were present:-

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| Minister     | Paedar MacMuiris - Education Officer           |
| Alan McVeigh | Cathal O Donnghaile - Development Officer      |
| Jim Russell  | Gabrielle Nig Uidhir - Director                |
|              | Sean MacGiolla Fhiondain - Treasurer           |
|              | Seamus MacSeairir - Chairman Meanscoil Feirste |

Also in attendance: Kevin Smith

The Minister welcomed the delegation and introduced those DENI officials present. He invited the delegation to make their representations to him, and said that he would be glad to respond to those points he could today and follow-up on a later date to issues on which he needed to consider further.

Paedar MacMuiris initiated discussion by talking about GO's policy towards Irish Medium Nursery Schools, pointing out that Nursery Schools should be recognised as such, and not playgroups. He asked the Minister what the Labour Party's views were on this issue, and indeed on early years learning in general.

In response the Minister reminded those present of the Party's commitment to the expansion of early years learning, but pointed out the difficulties which arose when comparing the entry age differences between the UK and NI. When he asked Mr MacMuiris why he was keen to differentiate between Nursery and Playschools, the delegation informed him that funding

mechanisms were different, pointing out that whilst Nursery Schools employed fully qualified teachers, playschools employed part-qualified staff.

The Minister added that with the rural dimension of NI, it would not be easy to promise that a Nursery School would be accessible for each eligible child and that this was not just a legal issue, it was a logistical one.

Mr McVeigh said that it was agreed that a Consultation Document on Nursery education would issue later in the year, and in response Mr MacMuiris said that GO would be making a case for Irish Medium Nursery Education.

Mr MacMuiris next spoke about the viability criteria for new schools and in particular changes in the enrolment thresholds in both primary and secondary sectors. He commented that these changes seemed to be a vindictive swipe by the last administration in its last days of power. He went on to say that this change was only imposed on Irish Medium and Integrated Schools, and that a large number of existing secondary schools frequently had first form intakes much lower than 100.

In reference to the change in viability criteria, the Minister said that this was not the case and that all school sectors were treated similarly in terms of first form entry requirements. There was no 2-tier system he added.

Mr McVeigh said that very few new schools were being created; the majority of capital work being undertaken were extensions and refurbishment of existing school estate.

GO then spoke about the assistance the previous administration had given to a pilot satellite scheme for Primary Education in Twinbrook. He said that this unit had now become established and had become cut-off from the host primary school, operating independently. He asked why this route could not be followed in other similar situations.

Mr McVeigh responded by saying that the Twinbrook 'pilot scheme' was currently being evaluated by the Department, and indications were that it had been a very effective scheme for the area. The School would be getting approval next month for capital and recurrent grant.

When asked about the time scale for completion of the satellite evaluation, Mr McVeigh indicated that it was hoped this would be towards the end of the year, at which time a consultation paper on Irish Medium units would be issued. He added that the key to the issue is that the Department is unable to insist that schools must act as a host for such units and that LMS issues were involved.

Mr O Donnghaile was grateful for this information, indicating that at present it seemed to him that neither DENI, CCMS nor the ELBs had a clear policy on the issue.

GO then spoke about Meanscoil Feirste saying that the previous administration had assisted financing the running costs of the school out of MBW resources, in advance of it achieving grant-aid status: he asked if Meanscoil Doire in Londonderry could be assisted in the same manner. He added that there were special circumstances to this school in that it was the only secondary level school in Londonderry where pupils could continue to be educated through the medium of Irish.

In response, Mr McVeigh said that the background to the MBW funding of Meanscoil Feirste was different to the position of Meanscoil Doire in that educational issues were considered when the decision to assist via MBW was made: ie the school was very close to achieving the viability criteria. He added that at that time no commitment was given to any form of ongoing funding.

GO thought that the school would no doubt achieve viability in the long term but agreed that this would not be in the timescale envisaged by DENI.

Mr MacMuiris asked the Minister if the special circumstances of Meanscoil Doire would enable it to be considered for viability testing under the old criteria, saying that it had existed in its present form for a number of years.

In reply the Minister said that he was unable to do this as it would leave the decision open to Judicial Review.

Mr MacMuiris then spoke about the real problems being encountered by IM schools in the recruitment of sufficient numbers of teachers trained in Irish, and that the number of places being

offered on IM teacher training courses were inadequate to meet demand. Recent projections of IM provision, he said, endorsed this view. In terms of teacher development, he added, no postgraduate courses existed in NI to cater for IM education, adding that some 75 teachers currently taught in the IM primary sector. These teachers were, he said, being penalised.

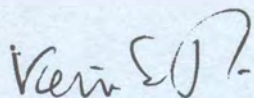
In response the Minister agreed that this was a serious issue which needed to be considered, but added that he was unable to direct universities to run particular modules. He could however bring this problem to their attention, and it was agreed that GO would provide information for the Minister to enable him to do so.

Due to time constraints, the meeting was required to wind-up quickly and the Minister agreed to reply in writing on the legal status, recognition and state funding of Gaeloiliuint.

**ACTION: MR McVEIGH**

The delegation left the Minister with a copy of their proposals for a 2-campus approach to secondary IM education in NI. The Minister also undertook to consider this and write to GO accordingly.

**ACTION: MR McVEIGH**



**K SMITH**