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Essay by Áine Hyland **"Primary and Second-Level Education in the Early
Twenty-First Century"**

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Abstract:

This essay was written in 1997 after the publication of the White Paper on Education which led to the passing in 1998 of the Education (Ireland) Act, Ireland's first comprehensive education legislation since the foundation of the State in 1922. The essay looks forward to the new millennium and highlights the areas of primary and second level education where change and reform will be required.

Primary and Second-Level Education in the Early Twenty-First Century

ÁINE HYLAND

A society which rates highly spiritual and moral values and seeks to develop the mental and physical well-being of its people will devote a substantial part of its resources to education. There are, in addition, social and economic considerations which reinforce the claim of education to an increasing share of expanding national resources. Improved and extended educational facilities help to equalise opportunities by enabling an increasing proportion of the community to develop their potentialities and raise their personal standards of living. Expenditure on education is an investment in the fuller use of the country's primary resource – its people – which can be expected to yield increasing returns in terms of economic progress.

Second Programme for Economic Expansion, 1963¹

THE *Second Programme for Economic Expansion*, published in 1963, had major significance for education in Ireland. This was the first public acknowledgement by government that expenditure on education was an investment in the nation's future. Taken with a number of other documents dating from the first half of the 1960s, it charted a new direction for Irish education. In the early 1960s, government spending on education in Ireland was estimated at 4.1 per cent of GNP.² Even the most optimistic projections did not envisage an increase of more than 0.6 of a percentage point in subsequent decades: the 1965 *Investment in Education* report suggested a rise to 4.7 per cent by 1970/71 – an increase which was described by the report team as 'substantial'.³ Today government spending on education is about 8 per cent of a very much larger GNP.⁴ Writing in a 1996 issue of *Administration*, Martin O'Donoghue, a member of the Investment in Education team in the 1960s, wrote:

I imagine ... that we would have regarded an 8 per cent share as being 'riches beyond the dreams of avarice' or – on a more down to earth note – more than adequate funding to support any necessary reforms or developments in the educational system.⁵

There was a considerable increase in the number of full-time students in education in Ireland at primary, second level and third level between 1965/66 and 1994/95, as Table 1 shows.

Table 1: Number of full-time pupils by level, 1965/66 and 1994/95

	1965/66		1994/95	
	Number	%	Number	%
Primary	504,865	75.5	499,282	51.4
Second level	142,983	21.4	375,457	38.6
Third level	20,698	3.1	96,681	10.0
Total	668,546	100.0	971,420	100.0

Source: D. Thornhill, Talk to Primary Principals' Conference, Cork, October 1996

In 1965 there were 668,000 pupils in full-time education. Thirty years later the figure was approaching one million. In 1965 more than three-quarters of the pupils were enrolled in primary schools and just over 20 per cent were enrolled at second level. Thirty years later, only half of the pupils were enrolled at primary level and the proportion at second level was almost 40 per cent.

Government expenditure at primary and second level has also increased dramatically, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2: Government expenditure on education per pupil by level, 1965/66 and 1994/95 (£, constant 1995 prices)

	1965/66	1994/95
Primary	425	1,425
Second level	850	2,225
Third level	2,375	3,750

Source: D. Thornhill, Talk to Primary Principals' Conference, Cork, October 1996

In 1965, exchequer current expenditure at primary and second level totalled £18.9 million and £9.7 million respectively. In 1995, the corresponding figures were £696.5 million and £825.6 million. Expressed in constant 1995 prices, government expenditure per student at primary level in 1965 was £425 whereas by 1995 it had increased to £1,425. At second level government current expenditure per student in 1965 was £850; it had risen to £2,225 by 1995. And although average pupil-teacher ratios in Ireland continue to be high by OECD standards, particularly at primary level, there has been nevertheless an appreciable decrease in the pupil-teacher ratio particularly at first level – from

33.6:1 in 1965 to 24.3:1 in 1993 to 22:1 in 1995. The decrease has not been as marked at second level where the ratio fell from 20:1 in 1965 to 18.1:1 in 1993.⁶

As we look forward to the twenty-first century it is interesting to speculate on how the education system at primary and second level will develop and to ask ourselves whether the investment level of the past thirty years will continue and what the outcomes of this investment are likely to be. The publication of the government's White Paper on education, *Charting our Education Future*, in 1995 and the relative openness and transparency of national policy-makers make this task a good deal easier than the task which confronted our predecessors thirty years ago. This paper will consider primary and second-level education in Ireland in the early decades of the twenty-first century under the following headings:

- the demographic situation and its likely effect on school enrolments
- the role of schooling in combating social exclusion
- curricular changes, including new approaches to teaching and learning
- implications of change for teachers – initial training, induction and incareer development
- administrative considerations.

Implications of demographic change for schooling

The last thirty years saw considerable fluctuation in the demographic situation. *Investment in Education* projected an average of about 65,000 births per annum in the early 1970s rising to 72,000 in the later years of that decade.⁷ What the report could not have envisaged was the significant immigration of the 1970s, with the result that the population had risen by about 25 per cent by the late 1970s. The annual birth figures also increased, culminating in a peak of 75,000 births in 1980. From 1981 onwards the annual number of births declined steadily and by 1994 had fallen to 48,000. The resultant fall in the child population in the past fifteen years has already had a significant effect on pupil enrolments at first and second level and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The most recent pupil projections for primary education suggest that enrolments could fall from the current 480,000 to 360,000 within the next twenty years. Enrolments are also projected to fall at second level. Currently there are about 375,000 pupils enrolled at second level; in twenty years' time the figure could be less than 300,000.⁸

It is of some relevance that official second-level figures currently include about 18,000 pupils enrolled in vocational courses at second level, almost all of which are post-Leaving Certificate courses. Within the past two years the Department of Education has finally recognised a category of 'further education', and while this new sector is still in something of a limbo, it is likely that its reality will be given more formal recognition within the next two decades. Other factors which make it somewhat more difficult to project enrolments at second level include the recent introduction of alternative tracks within the senior-cycle programme. The introduction of Transition Year as a right for all students has been widely welcomed. In the current year (1996/97) almost three-quarters of second-level schools are offering Transition Year as an option, and this has resulted in an increase in student numbers at second level. Currently, 80 per cent of the relevant age cohort remain on in school until the end of senior cycle and the White Paper on education stated that 'the target is for at least a 90 per cent completion rate [at senior cycle] by the end of the 1990s'.⁹ With the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied in 1996, a new and different programme is now available for those students for whom the established Leaving Certificate is not appropriate or satisfactory. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme provides a high-status, more vocationally oriented Leaving Certificate, as recommended by the Culliton Report in 1992.¹⁰ These two initiatives are already attracting significant numbers of students and it is likely that the 90 per cent target for senior-cycle completion will be reached by the end of this decade.

Combating social exclusion

The *Report of the Constitution Review Group* points out that there is a much greater awareness in the 1990s of the implications of educational inequality than there was in the past. It suggests that the implications of the failure of the education system to cater adequately for the needs of the less advantaged are serious – for the individual, the economy and society – and it states:

Because of the central role which knowledge plays in determining the generation of wealth, it is extremely important that all people have access to education, and can participate and benefit from it so that they are not precluded from the process of wealth generation in society. As the Annual School Leavers Surveys conducted by the Department of Labour show, there is a positive correlation between the level of education attained and employment opportunities and those who leave school without any formal credentials are severely disadvantaged in the labour market.¹¹

The accelerated pace of change in the 1990s and the demands that this has placed on the education system have been widely acknowledged. Schools are continually challenged to meet the changing demands posed by economic, political and social change. While the Irish education system is believed to provide a sound academic basis for many young people who aspire to higher education and to entry to the professions, there is increasing concern that it is failing to address the issue of underachieving and non-achieving pupils who account for up to 20 per cent of the age cohort. A number of reports including the White Paper on education and the Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 1994–1999¹² have identified the need to broaden the education system in order to:

- deal effectively with school failure
- improve retention rates and combat early school leaving, and
- strengthen the vocational and enterprise dimension in second-level schools.

In spite of increasing investment in education, educational inequality resulting from social and economic disadvantage remains a problem. The *Report on the National Education Convention* points out that the individual and social costs of educational failure can be great and that prevention costs are relatively insignificant when measured against the prospective costs of correcting educational failure through welfare, health and perhaps justice services.¹³

In spite of the many changes in the education system during the past decades, some of the more intransigent problems still remain to be resolved. A 1997 report by the National Economic and Social Forum estimates that approximately 1,000 young people drop out of full-time education while still at primary level, 3,000 leave without any qualifications, 7,500 leave with only the Junior Certificate and a further 2,500 leave with the Junior Certificate and some subsequent vocational qualification but without a Leaving Certificate.¹⁴ Long-term unemployment rates for early school-leavers are depressingly high – up to 50 per cent for some categories. The 1995 EU White Paper on education and training focuses particularly on this problem. It states:

There is a risk of a rift in society between those that can interpret; those who can only use; and those who are pushed out of mainstream society and rely on social support: in other words between those who know and those who do not know.¹⁵

It goes on to state that 'a special effort has to be made for the most vulnerable sections of the population, particularly in the urban areas

hardest hit by unemployment'. It recognises that 'naturally everything starts at school which is where the learning society has its root' and concludes: 'School has to adapt but nevertheless remains the irreplaceable instrument of everyone's personal development and social integration.'

Need to support the disadvantaged

There has been increasing recognition in recent years of the need to provide additional state support for disadvantaged groups within the education system. There is also an acknowledgement of the need for early intervention to identify and support children at risk of failure. The following list from a 1996 article by Clancy includes some current and recommended programmes within what he refers to as the 'intervention agenda':

- pre-school early start programme
- home-school community liaison programme
- designation of disadvantaged areas
- early identification of educational underachievement
- remedial teachers
- targeted reduction of pupil-teacher ratios
- school psychological service
- enhanced capitation grants for designated schools
- setting of explicit policy targets for:
 - reduction of educational failure
 - participation of children of the travelling community
 - participation in higher education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Youthreach
- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
- quota of reserved higher education places for those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- higher education access programmes
- links between third-level colleges and designated second-level schools.¹⁶

Clancy points out that pre-school intervention has been identified as an area which should get priority. He also states that there is strong support for the innovative home-school community liaison project.

Criteria have been established by which certain schools have been designated 'disadvantaged' but most disadvantaged pupils are still in

normal schools. However, the weight of research seems to support current government policy of targeting additional resources at designated schools, and the 1995 publication *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland* by Kellaghan et al. puts forward nine specific recommendations for consideration in formulating national policy relating to schemes of assistance to schools in designated areas of disadvantage.¹⁷ These recommendations include proposals for very specific targeting of a limited number of schools in which there is a high concentration of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Under the recently announced 'breaking the cycle' initiative the Minister for Education has already adopted this policy and it will be interesting to see within the next decade or so what the result of this policy will be. Other suggestions – including one that the intervention should be comprehensive and co-ordinated – are also being implemented, well-resourced support structures have been put in place, and linkages are being developed with the Operational Programme for local urban and rural development in order to tackle the problem on a multifaceted basis. It will be important that all of these initiatives are carefully monitored as there is a danger that strategies to deal with disadvantage will result in penalising effective schools and rewarding ineffective ones.

Children of the traveller community

The education of children of the traveller community continues to be a serious problem in Ireland. The participation rates of traveller children at all levels of the educational system are 'unacceptably low for a democratic society'.¹⁸ It is estimated that there are about 5,000 traveller children of primary school age in the state, 4,200 of whom attend primary schools. Of these, about 1,800 are in ordinary classes and the rest are in either special classes or special schools.¹⁹ In the White Paper on education, the government has stated as a policy objective that all traveller children of primary school age should be enrolled and participate fully in primary education according to their individual abilities and potential within five years. It also states that traveller children will be encouraged to enjoy a full and integrated education within the school system and that the placement of these children in special schools and classes will be done only on the basis of special educational need.²⁰

At second level the problem is more serious, with the current participation of traveller children being very low. The 1995 *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* pointed out that whereas significant improvement has occurred in both the standard of and access to second-level education for the general population in the past thirty

years, this improvement has had little or no impact on the traveller population.²¹ While no definitive statistics exist in relation to the enrolment of traveller children at second level, it is estimated that only approximately 100 traveller children aged 12–15 years attend mainstream second-level schools out of the estimated 2,000 children eligible to do so.²² The White Paper on education states that the overall policy objective is that within ten years all traveller children of second-level, school-going age will complete junior-cycle education and 50 per cent will complete the senior cycle.²³ However, this objective is unlikely to be reached without great difficulty. The highly competitive structure of second-level education as it has evolved in recent decades militates against children with learning difficulties, including traveller children. They find it particularly difficult to cope with the organisational structure of our second-level schools, especially the inhospitable practice of moving from teacher to teacher and from room to room as is usually required by a subject-based approach to curriculum. Government policy in this regard will not be successful unless there is a determined commitment on the part of school authorities to respond creatively to the challenges which will inevitably arise in relation to the education of traveller children.

Children with special educational needs

A further area which will require commitment and determination on the part of school authorities is the education of young people with special educational needs – those young people who during the past thirty years or so were enrolled in special schools, for example schools for mildly and moderately handicapped pupils. Government policy is that a continuum of provision should be provided for children and young people with special educational needs. Such provision could range from occasional help within the ordinary school to full-time education in a dedicated centre or unit, with students being able to move from one type of provision to another as necessary and practicable.²⁴ Such a policy has already begun to be put in place at primary school level, and at second level a small number of schools in Dublin and Cork are recognised as designated schools for students with physical, visual or hearing impairment and they have been given additional teachers and support personnel. Most of their students can be included in normal classes for most of the curriculum and they sit the public examinations, some with special concessions. The *Report of the Special Education Review Committee* concluded:

By and large this model of provision works well and enables the student with the disability to benefit to the greatest extent possible from attendance in an ordinary school. It is a model which could usefully be extended to other areas of the country.²⁵

However, because of the geographical spread of pupils with special needs, it may not be as easy in practice to ensure a continuum of provision as outlined in the White Paper for pupils outside the city areas.

A further issue which will become more pressing during the coming decades will be the provision of suitable education for profound and severely handicapped young people. Until recently, educational provisions for these children were limited if not non-existent. However, a 1993 decision of the High Court ruled that such children have a right to an appropriate education.²⁶

Curricular changes, including new approaches to teaching and learning

The subject choices of current second-level students differ in many respects from the choices made by their parents thirty years ago, as Table 3 shows. As can be seen from the table, there were significant differences in the proportion of pupils taking Latin to Leaving Certificate level between 1964 and 1994. In 1994 less than 1 per cent of boys took Leaving Certificate Latin compared to nearly 90 per cent thirty years earlier. There has also been a substantial increase in the numbers taking modern European languages. The emphasis within the language syllabi has also changed during the period, with a much greater emphasis on oral language today than there was in the past. This emphasis will increase in the coming decades as there is a commitment in the White Paper on education to increase the proportion of Leaving Certificate marks for oral and aural competence:

The policy objective will be to move towards a position where 60 per cent of the total marks available will be awarded for oral and aural competence in the Irish language and in modern European languages. ... Furthermore, second-level schools will be encouraged to promote a wide range of languages, including Spanish and German.²⁷

A number of cross-curricular areas of study have also been introduced in recent years. These include various Pastoral Care, and Social and Health programmes.

In the coming decade further curricular changes will occur. All schools will be required to introduce Civic, Social and Political Education at junior cycle from 1997/98. This will be an examinable subject, and will replace the old Civics programme which had not been overhauled since its

introduction in the 1960s. A new cross-curricular programme in Relationships and Sexuality Education will also be introduced in 1997/98. Within the coming decade, two subjects which have been marginalised in many schools in the past because of their non-examinable status are likely to become 'exam' subjects. These are Religious Education and Physical Education. These subjects will require an innovative approach to assessment and certification, and discussions are currently taking place with teachers and management about possibilities in this regard.

Table 3: Percentage of second-level students studying selected subjects at senior cycle – Leaving Certificate programme by gender, 1964 and 1994^(a)

Subject	Boys		Girls	
	1964	1994	1964	1994
Applied Mathematics	10.9	3.4	0.0	0.4
Art ^(b)	1.8	14.6	18.2	21.4
Biology	n/a	36.0	n/a	64.9
Botany	2.2	n/a	8.6	n/a
Business Organisation ^(c)	n/a	34.8	n/a	39.4
Chemistry	31.7	15.4	4.8	13.2
Classical Studies	n/a	1.3	n/a	0.7
Commerce	22.0	n/a	13.9	n/a
Construction Studies	n/a	25.1	n/a	1.1
Domestic Science	–	n/a	60.3	n/a
Drawing/Technical Drawing	29.0	30.0	17.5	1.4
Engineering	n/a	19.9	n/a	0.8
English	99.7	99.0	100.0	99.1
French	21.0	52.5	64.4	69.6
General Science	5.2	n/a	4.7	n/a
Geography	80.9	45.1	89.6	36.8
German	1.9	17.4	2.7	22.0
Greek	8.6	0.03	0.0	0.0
History	64.3	30.4	73.1	26.0
Home Economics ^(d)	n/a	9.9	n/a	56.7
Irish	99.3	95.9	99.4	97.2
Latin	88.3	0.5	38.5	0.2
Maths	99.3	99.1	82.3	98.8
Music ^(e)	0.6	0.7	1.7	3.2
Physics	28.8	29.4	2.0	9.4
Physics and Chemistry	7.2	4.1	4.7	1.5
Physiology and Hygiene	1.0	n/a	41.8	n/a

(a) The Leaving Certificate programme was offered only in secondary schools in 1964.

(b) The figures for Art in 1994 include both the Design and the Craftwork option.

(c) As well as Business Organisation, Accounting and Economics are also offered in senior cycle.

(d) Home Economics includes both Social and Scientific, and General.

(e) Music includes both Syllabus A and Syllabus B.

Source: Table compiled from *Investment in Education – Report of the Survey Team*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1965, p. 276, and Department of Education, *Statistical Report, 1993/94*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1996

At primary level, there has been no substantive change in the curriculum guidelines since the so-called 'New Curriculum' was introduced in 1971. However, this is shortly to change; the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is currently putting the finishing touches on a revised curriculum which is expected to be introduced into all schools before the end of the decade.²⁸ This revised programme will retain the fundamental child-centred approach of the current curriculum but will restructure the curriculum to facilitate the early identification of children who are falling behind, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. It will place greater emphasis on oral skills in English and on a more practically orientated approach in Mathematics. A more specific Science programme will be introduced and the Irish language curriculum will be radically revised. The new programme will also include an expansion of the Arts education curriculum, with a greater emphasis on the appreciative aspects of Visual Arts. Finally, a new programme in Social, Personal and Health Education will be introduced.

The teacher as facilitator

In bygone times, schools and teachers were repositories of knowledge. They were regarded as the fount of knowledge to which empty vessels would come in order to be filled. Together with the local priest and the doctor, the teacher was looked up to and respected as an educated person to whom others could turn for advice. While the status of teachers in Ireland remains high, they are no longer on the pedestal of the past. Although they may no longer be regarded as the main repositories of knowledge, I believe the key role of teachers in the education of young people will continue into the twenty-first century. Their role will not however be that of purveyors of knowledge; rather they will be facilitators and providers of opportunities for learning – supporting, motivating and encouraging young people to learn for themselves.

The theory of multiple intelligences

In this regard it is pertinent to refer to recent research in the United States on the theory of intelligence and its implications for teaching and learning. The classical view of intelligence suggested that there was a single form of logic and a single form of thinking. This view influenced the development of curriculum as far back as the ancient Greek education systems which emphasised logic, rhetoric and geometry – skills which stressed linear abstract reasoning. Such a curriculum was maintained into the Middle Ages and through the Renaissance when the

era of modern scientific investigations began. Scientific psychology, which dates from the mid-nineteenth century, was built on the view that intelligence was closely linked to skill in abstract thinking.²⁹

However, research in the 1980s by cognitive psychologists, particularly in the United States, has put forward a different view of intelligence. The central point emerging from this research is that there is not just one underlying mental capacity, but rather a variety of intelligences working in combination. This theory of multiple intelligences is based on a synthesis of evidence from diverse sources. Its main proponent is Howard Gardner, who regards the intelligences not as physical entities but 'only as potentially useful scientific constructs'. He sees intelligence as 'not a thing but rather a potential, the presence of which allows an individual access to forms of thinking appropriate to specific kinds of content'. In his early work in the 1980s, Gardner proposed that there were at least seven intelligences and in his more recent work he adds an eighth:

- linguistic – the capacity to use words effectively
- musical – the capacity to perceive, discriminate, transform and express musical forms
- logical/mathematical – the capacity to use numbers effectively
- visual/spatial – the ability to perceive the visual/spatial world accurately
- bodily/kinaesthetic – expertise in using one's whole body to express ideas and feelings
- intrapersonal – self-knowledge and the ability to act adaptively on the basis of that knowledge
- interpersonal – the ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations and feelings of other people
- naturalist – the ability to recognise and classify the numerous species of one's environment.³⁰

Although the intelligences are set out separately in Gardner's literature, he makes the point that in life one never finds intelligences operating in isolation. All roles and products involve a combination of intelligences.

Implications of the theory of multiple intelligences for the curriculum

Multiple intelligences theory offers a useful framework for curriculum design in schools. If people possess at least eight intelligences, then their educational experiences should provide opportunities for all of these to be developed and should recognise the potential for accessing

knowledge through various intelligences. The educational culture in this country, as indeed in most Western countries, and consequently our educational system tend to emphasise linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences, while bodily/kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences in particular are often neglected and marginalised.³¹

It is increasingly recognised that young people learn more effectively when they are actively engaged in the process of planning, doing, reviewing, recording and target setting.³² The White Paper on education emphasises the value of active learning methodologies at all levels.³³ One way of enabling students to take more control of their learning is to help them to understand themselves as learners, to appreciate and value their strengths and to identify their weaknesses. Multiple intelligences theory can be used as a way of helping young people to understand their own learning process, to recognise and value their strengths, and to identify ways in which they can build upon these while developing the areas which are less strong.

There is no blueprint for a multiple intelligences classroom, especially not in this country where the theory has only begun to be adopted. There are many suggestions for classroom practice from experience in the United States but these will need to be adapted to meet the needs of Irish teachers and pupils.³⁴ A number of possibilities have been suggested, including the planning of lessons to provide different gateways to learning particular topics or concepts. It might also be useful to consider the increased use of colour, music, movement, and audio and visual aids in the classroom (access to new information technologies would facilitate this). Another approach might be to help individual students to develop their own individual profile, outlining their own strengths and weaknesses in different intelligences and devising strategies and approaches to use and build on their various strengths.

Reform of assessment

Since curricular reform and assessment reform are so closely inter-related, curricular reform should not be undertaken without reference to assessment reform. If our educational goals promote a broad range of outcomes and recognise a wide variety of educational achievements, these goals should be reflected in an equally broad assessment policy. Assessment drives the curriculum, and this is true particularly in Ireland because of our historical tradition. When government funding first became available for secondary education in 1878, the money was distributed to schools on the basis of the results of their pupils at public examinations. In more recent years, pressure from the Leaving Cert-

ificate points system has contributed to an assessment-driven approach to teaching and learning.

Traditional patterns of assessment tend to reward intellectual/cognitive aspects of achievement and the subjects in which these forms of achievement are pre-eminent. They only recognise a fraction of the multiple intelligences described by Gardner. There are increasing arguments for expanding and developing the traditional patterns of examination and assessment with which we are familiar. Gardner has referred to intelligence-fair assessments in his writing. Other US educationists refer to authentic assessment as those forms of assessment that reflect real-life situations and challenge pupils' ability to test what they have learned in those situations.³⁵ Authentic assessment has the following features:

- it is based on actual forms of what we want pupils to be good at (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, creating, doing research, solving problems)
- it requires more complex and challenging mental processes
- it acknowledges more than one approach or right answer
- it emphasises uncoached explanations and real products
- it has transparent criteria and standards
- it involves trained assessor judgement.

The White Paper on education pays particular attention to the significance of appropriate approaches to assessment. It acknowledges that assessment and the uses to which it is put influence teaching methods and the wider school environment. It points out that assessment procedures should be comprehensive enough to test the full range of abilities across the curriculum and to evaluate all the elements of learning.³⁶

It is generally accepted that the current Junior Certificate examination does not adequately support the achievement of the full range of curricular objectives as set out in the new Junior Certificate programme. This is recognised in the White Paper where it is stated that 'an essential shift in emphasis from external examinations to internal assessment will be implemented in the future and ... new assessment methods will include projects, orals, aurals and practical work'.³⁷ The development of appropriate approaches to authentic assessment is one of the challenges which face educational planners and decision-makers during the coming decades. The issue has already been addressed to some extent by those involved in devising the assessment of the Leaving Certificate Applied and the link modules of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Portfolio assessment is an important component of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Authentic assessment approaches are also

used for the Leaving Certificate Applied where a range of 'tasks' are identified and assessed. The Junior Certificate Elementary Programme also includes innovative approaches to assessment, including profiles of achievement noted and recorded over a period of time.

It will be important during the next decade or so that employers and those involved in determining entry criteria for further and higher education institutions look seriously at these new and innovative approaches to assessment and be fair and open-minded in their appraisal of them. It would be a pity if new modes and techniques of assessment were dismissed or rejected out of hand, simply because employers and others were unprepared to reconsider their traditional approaches to selection and were unwilling to give young people an opportunity to prove that a different approach to learning and assessment might well be as successful as what we have become familiar with – if not more so.

Implications of change for teachers – initial training, induction and incareer development

There has been a sharp increase in recent years in the professional needs of teachers arising not only from curricular changes but also from a significant broadening of the role of the teacher. This broadening role encompasses:

Not only the instructional, the custodial, the inspirational and the disciplinary but extends into practically all spheres of life with teachers acting as agents of physical, moral, and spiritual development, emotional and mental health and social welfare.³⁸

Among the factors creating new demands on teachers in the education system are the following:

- changes in economic, technological, social and cultural aspects of society requiring new teacher methodologies and curricula
- falling numbers of pupils and the concomitant reduction in the need for new teachers resulting in a stable, ageing profession
- the broadening role of teachers in terms of school administration and management, and in terms of meeting growing demands in such areas as parent-teacher relationships, pastoral care and counselling, and coping with pupils with learning difficulties and with pupils from socially deprived backgrounds
- the personal development needs of teachers to meet the demands of changing role and expectation.³⁹

The *Report on the National Education Convention* recognises that 'the quality, morale and status of the teaching profession are of central importance to the achievement of desired reforms in the decades ahead'.⁴⁰ The report refers to the importance of supporting a policy which views the teaching career as a continuum involving initial teacher education, induction processes and incareer development opportunities available periodically throughout a teacher's career. While each of these points of support is important, it may well be, as stated in the OECD report *Schools and Quality*, that 'at a time of declining student numbers and declining recruitment through initial training, investment in inservice education is manifestly the most effective way of improving the quality of teaching generally'.⁴¹ Another recent OECD report *Schools under Scrutiny* has noted that improved initial teacher training and inservice teacher training is one key method of raising standards in education but comments that governments are sometimes reluctant to launch big inservice programmes because of the cost and because they may not reach the staff who really need to improve.⁴² This may be one of the biggest challenges to educational policy-makers during the coming decades – how to address in a comprehensive way the needs and aspirations of talented and well-educated young teachers as they progress through their careers. A 1993 report from the National Economic and Social Council notes that, rather than being viewed as a facility provided at times of dramatic change, inservice teacher training should be an accepted regular constituent part of teacher education. It recommends that

necessary changes in organisational and other arrangements must be effected to enable this to happen. This is of particular importance given the relatively low turnover in teaching staff. The teaching profession cannot be expected to continue delivering a quality service ... if [teachers] are not equipped with the necessary skills to do so.⁴³

EU funding of almost £40 million has been obtained for incareer development in this country during the period of the five-year plan for 1994–99. A major programme of inservice has been initiated and new models and approaches to teacher inservice have been put in place in the context of this funding. A particularly successful approach has been that taken in the context of the Transition Year programme. Under this initiative a national team of six teachers have been released for a two-year period and this team, with the assistance of regional co-ordinators, have put in place a nationwide support process for teachers involved in Transition Year. This model of inservice is school focused, i.e. the national and regional co-ordinators work with the teachers within the

context of either an individual school or groups of schools. They advise and support the teachers and help them to devise appropriate and relevant curriculum and assessment approaches for their individual schools. Similar models are being implemented for teachers in curricular areas such as Relationships and Sexuality Education and Civic, Social and Political Education at junior cycle. Initial evaluation reports suggest that this approach to incareer development is effective and it is likely that this model of inservice will be more widely used in the coming decade. The strengthening of the education centre network is another major plank for inservice development; EU funding is being used to increase the number of full-time centres and to develop a more permanent infrastructure for them. Many of the problems relating to difficulties of access, inappropriateness of models of inservice, etc. are now being tackled and feedback from teachers suggests that satisfaction levels with the current approaches are reasonably high.

The introduction of a revised primary school curriculum in the near future will necessitate a major programme of inservice for primary teachers and it is likely that the approach to this programme will build on good practice and on the innovations introduced for second-level teachers in the recent past.

Administrative considerations

Possibly the most visible and potentially controversial area of change in education in the coming decade will be the administrative area.

There has been criticism in recent years of the overcentralised approach to educational administration in Ireland. The 1993 Green Paper on education, *Education for a Changing World*, indicated that the Department of Education intended to divest itself 'of its excessive involvement in day-to-day administration of the education system'.⁴⁴ The *Report on the National Education Convention* stated that:

The highly centralised character of educational administration has also fostered a culture of dependency with an overreliance placed by institutions on the department's role, which may have resulted in the sapping of self-reliance and innovative approaches at local level.⁴⁵

Joe Lee, in his major work *Ireland 1912-1985*, made a similar point when he wrote 'A big question mark hangs in any case over the appropriateness of highly centralised "planning" in the fields of education and health' and added: 'In many advanced countries, responsibility for both these activities lies, in varying degrees, with local and regional authorities.'⁴⁶

While many people's perception of our education system is of a highly centralised bureaucracy, a 1995 OECD/CERI report found that decision-making in Irish education is in fact more school focused than it is in any of the other thirteen countries surveyed. The survey identified four possible levels of decision-making – school, lower intermediate level, upper intermediate level and central government – and found that Ireland has the highest proportion of decisions taken at school level – 73 per cent – with New Zealand a close second at 71 per cent.⁴⁷ Table 4 shows the situation in each of the fourteen countries surveyed.

Table 4: Proportion of decisions taken at decision-making levels in fourteen OECD countries (%)

	School	Lower intermediate level	Upper intermediate level	Central government
Austria	28	8	26	28
Belgium	25	50	25	—
Denmark	41	44	—	15
Finland	40	47	—	13
France	31	—	35	33
Germany	33	42	18	7
Ireland	73	8	—	19
New Zealand	71	—	—	29
Norway	32	45	—	23
Portugal	40	—	3	57
Spain	28	26	13	33
Sweden	48	48	—	4
Switzerland	10	40	50	—
United States	26	71	3	—

Source: OECD/CERI, *Decision-Making in 14 OECD Education Systems*, Paris: OECD, 1995, p. 40

The report points out:

In Ireland and New Zealand, the school's importance in the decision-making structure is similar to that for private education. In Ireland's case this is partly due to the fact that public sector schools belong to religious establishments, which enjoy a broad measure of autonomy as regards resources and management of non-teaching staff.

In the vast majority of the countries surveyed, the school takes between 25 per cent and 41 per cent of decisions and there is a fairly even sharing of decision-making between institutional, local, regional and national levels. The lack of intermediate structures in Ireland has meant that educational decision-making is polarised at the institutional and the central extremes.

This imbalance is likely to be redressed shortly, with the setting up of ten regional education boards. The rationale for these education boards was summarised in the White Paper on education as follows:

- The need for greater awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of local and regional communities in order to improve the quality, equality, efficiency and relevance and flexibility of delivery of all educational services.
- The value of further involvement and empowerment of local and regional communities, in addition to their current and continuing involvement at school level.
- The desirability of releasing the Department of Education from much of its current involvement in the detailed delivery of services to schools, in order to allow it concentrate on the development and monitoring of the education system at national level.
- A realisation that the demands of educational provision cannot, in many instances, be met at the level of the individual school.⁴⁸

Draft legislation to set up education boards has recently been published and will shortly be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. It is proposed to transfer 'substantial co-ordination and support service functions' to these boards while ensuring at the same time that they will not 'impinge on areas of responsibility and discretion proper to individual school boards'.⁴⁹

The transfer of some functions from the Department of Education to the new education boards will, it is hoped, free up the department to 'concentrate on higher level administration and policy oriented tasks' as recommended in the OECD report *Review of Educational Systems – Ireland* in 1991.⁵⁰ The role of the department will be changed to focus on strategic planning and policy and on the execution of those activities most efficiently conducted at national level. This is in keeping with the government's 'vision for Ireland' as presented in the coalition government's policy agreement *A Government of Renewal* (1994) and reiterated in *Delivering Better Government – Strategic Management Initiative*, published in May 1996:

In the lifetime of this Government, we pledge ourselves to the reform of our institutions at national and local level to provide service, accountability, transparency and freedom of information. In so doing, we are committed to extending the opportunities for democratic participation by citizens in all aspects of public life.⁵¹

While the establishment of regional education boards will provide a framework for the devolution of educational decision-making, the new boards will need to tread carefully to ensure that they maintain the co-operation of the various partners in education, particularly the churches.

The symbiotic relationship between church and state in education is one which most Irish people take for granted, but when the OECD examiners visited Ireland in 1990, they found that this relationship was 'the most intriguing factor for the external observer'. They wrote:

The State would not contemplate subverting the authority of the Church in educational matters either by usurping any of its functions or by introducing measures that it would be likely to find unpalatable. Change is only feasible through discreet negotiations and an unspoken search for consensus ... it is a question of the State not embarking on a reform affecting the school system as a whole without the implicit or explicit assent of the Church and where applicable other interest groups.⁵²

During the coming decades a combination of falling school rolls and a reluctance on the part of the state to usurp any of the functions of the church in education is likely to lead to tension and clashes about the suitability of the Irish education system for all our young people. Ireland is no longer a homogeneous society in terms of culture, religion, race or ethnicity (if indeed it ever was). There is an increasing recognition of pluralism as an important underlying educational principle, and this recognition is evident in the White Paper on education. An aspiration to pluralism is praiseworthy but it raises problems in a context where virtually all primary schools are owned and controlled by the churches. Table 5 shows that in 1992/93 only ten primary schools (multidenominational) were not church-owned schools.⁵³ That figure had increased to fourteen (one of which is an all-Irish school) by 1996/97.

Table 5: Number and type of primary schools, 1992/93

Category	Number of schools
Catholic	2,988
Church of Ireland	190
Presbyterian	18
Multidenominational	10
Methodist	1
Jewish	1
Muslim	1

Source: Department of Education

An increasing proportion of the population belong to religions which do not own or control schools or describe themselves as having no religion. In the 1991 census of population the proportion in these two categories together with those who chose not to declare a religious affiliation came to almost 6 per cent of the overall population.⁵⁴ In other words, approximately 30,000 children of primary school age do

not belong to the churches which own and control schools. In addition, there is evidence that, given the choice, a significant proportion of Catholic and Protestant families would prefer their children to attend religiously integrated or multid denominational schools.

During the past two decades, fourteen multid denominational primary schools have been set up by parents who wish to have this option for their children. Most of these schools are oversubscribed and have long waiting lists. But some parents are now taking the view that it should not be necessary for groups of parents to trudge the tortuous and expensive route of setting up (privately owned) multid denominational schools and that the state, either directly or through regional boards, should provide such schools as is done in all other EU countries.⁵⁵

The *Report of the Constitution Review Group* addressed issues such as these in its treatment of education and religion, and stated that these and similar problems have been avoided to date largely by ad hoc and pragmatic responses in particular situations.⁵⁶ However, the report is of the view that, with an increasingly diverse and rights-conscious society, these problems can no longer be ignored. It points out that 'Many of these difficulties are attributable to the fact that, unlike other countries, there is not a parallel system of non-denominational schools organised by the State which would cater for the interests of minorities', and adds:

The present situation, therefore, presents a potential conflict of rights to which there is no satisfactory answer. The conflict lies between the rights of the child (exercised through its parents) not to be coerced to attend religious instruction at a publicly funded school and the right of denominational schools in receipt of such public funding to provide for the fulness of denominational education through the medium of an integrated curriculum and other measures designed to preserve the religious ethos of a particular school.

In view of the increasing tendency of individuals to have recourse to litigation for adjudication of their constitutional rights, it seems likely that within the next decade or so the issues discussed here will come before the courts, and decisions made by the judiciary could have significant implications.

Conclusion

It has been possible in this paper to focus on only a small number of the issues which are likely to arise in relation to primary and second-level education in the coming decades. Issues which have not been addressed include the implications of the dramatic decrease in the child population

for school rationalisation and amalgamation. In parallel with this decrease, there is a growing demand from parents for a wider choice of schooling for their children. This issue came to public attention in July 1996 when the Minister for Education refused to sanction a number of proposed new Gaelscoileanna at primary level. The demand for all-Irish schools is a relatively recent phenomenon but it will be difficult in coming decades for governments to meet the growing demand for Gaelscoileanna and multid denominational schools while simultaneously presiding over the closure of adjacent denominational schools. This issue is currently being addressed by the Commission on School Accommodation Needs but there is not likely to be an easy solution in the immediate future.

Other issues which this paper has not considered include the implications for secondary schools of the decline in religious vocations. Thirty years ago, about half of the teachers in secondary schools were priests or members of religious orders or congregations. By 1990 the proportion had fallen to 12 per cent, and it is likely to be less than 5 per cent by the turn of the century.⁵⁷ Thirty years ago the principalship of virtually all Catholic secondary schools was held by a priest, a brother or a nun. Today, about half of the principals are lay men or women and the number is increasing year by year. The ad hoc management approaches of the past are being superseded by more professional models of management. Negotiations are currently taking place to set up middle-management structures in all schools of an adequate size.⁵⁸ Internal management structures will be paralleled by a more structured, accountable and transparent management approach by the schools' boards of management. This will be manifest through published school plans and annual reports, and through the development of whole-school inspection in all schools – a move which is not likely to occur without some controversy.⁵⁹

I am confident that the Irish schools of the twenty-first century will maintain and improve the generally high standard that has characterised Irish education in the past decades. We are no longer as naive as some of our political masters in the 1950s who smugly reassured themselves that Ireland had the best education system in the world.⁶⁰ Today there are international agencies which provide indicators of comparative educational performance across a number of countries.⁶¹ While Ireland does not come out at the top of the league, its performance is creditable particularly when one notes the position of Ireland in the league of comparative indicators of resource input.

At the end of the day, we must always remember that education is about people – good structures and physical resources are a help in

delivering a good service but nothing can replace a caring, able and committed teacher. The following quotation from the White Paper on education is an appropriate note on which to end this paper:

The quality, morale and status of the teaching profession are of central importance to the continuing development of a first-class education system in the decades ahead ... Teachers have made an enormous contribution to Irish society. The profession's standing has also been recognised internationally. It is important, therefore, that the career of teaching continues to attract talented people and that it proves professionally rewarding to those who follow it.⁶²

NOTES

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