

THE SCHOOLS EQUALITY PACT

We ask the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) to urgently pass a comprehensive Schools Equality Bill to reform the current State-funded religious discrimination. This PACT (Patronage, Access, Curriculum, Teaching) describes the changes that are collectively needed. The State has a duty to respect equally the human rights of all children, parents and teachers. This requires a national network of public secular schools, inclusive of all, neutral between religions and atheism, and focused on the educational needs of all children equally. Divesting some religious schools to new private patrons will not achieve pluralism in education. The Oireachtas Education Committee has warned that multiple patronage and ethos can lead to segregation and inequality. The UN and Council of Europe have warned our schools breach human rights. The State now claims it is constitutionally obliged to allow State-funded schools to discriminate against its own citizens in this way. Others disagree. We ask the Government to respect democracy, and stop closing down debate with an unpublished, untested legal opinion. Finally, if the Courts do find that the Constitution obliges the State to support this discrimination, then we urgently need a Schools Equality Referendum.

P = PATRONAGE

Children have a right to attend inclusive public schools

State-funded schools should have an inclusive public ethos, to respect everyone equally under Articles 42.1 and 42.3.1 of the Constitution. Moral education should be separate from religion, as per Article 42.3.2. The State should not cede control of education to private patrons. Private ethos schools should be an optional extra, not the basis of the system. Please amend the Education Act to do this. Start the reform in the nine schools where the Minister for Education is patron.

A = ACCESS

Children have an equal right to attend their local public school

Children should have equal access to their local State-funded school, whatever their religion. The Admission to Schools Bill will outlaw some discrimination, but it reinforces discrimination against atheist and minority faith families, calling it 'lawful oversubscription criteria.' Please delete Section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act to prevent all religious discrimination. If oversubscribed, give priority to children with siblings in the school, then to local children, then use a lottery.

C = CURRICULUM

Children have a right to an objective pluralist education

Children should be taught the State curriculum, including about religions and beliefs, in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, as per the European Convention on Human Rights. Faith formation should be outside the school day. Please amend S 15.2(b) of the Education Act, and the curriculum. Remove Rule 68 of National Schools, that religious instruction is by far the most important subject and a religious spirit must inform and vivify the whole work of the school.

T = TEACHING

Teachers have an equal right to work in state-funded schools

Children should be taught by the best teachers, and teachers should have equal access, based on merit, to jobs in State-funded schools. Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act allows schools to discriminate against teachers on the ground of religion. The current Section 37 Amendment Bill will protect Catholic LGBT teachers, but reinforces discrimination against atheist and minority faith teachers. Please amend Section 37 to prevent all religious discrimination against teachers.

**WE URGENTLY NEED A SCHOOLS EQUALITY BILL
WE MAY NEED A SCHOOLS EQUALITY REFERENDUM**