

APPENDIX 1

Testimonies

The following are selected accounts of individuals' experiences in the education system. Many people who told us of their experiences wished to remain anonymous because of the discrimination experienced by non-Catholics in Irish society. Because religion-based discrimination is permitted in the employment of teachers, nurses etc. in the public sector, individuals working in these sectors often feel forced to conceal their religious beliefs for fear of repercussions in employment. It is submitted that this situation is itself contrary to Article 18 ICCPR and the right to freedom of expression under 19 ICCPR.

“My eldest son is due to start primary school in September 2015 in Terenure, Dublin 6/6w, however I still do not have a school place for him. Our family has no religion and would therefore prefer to access an equality based, secular or a non-denomination school. There are no such schools in our immediate community. We applied to Educate Together (equality based) schools in surrounding locations, however they are full.

My son is discriminated against in all the local religious schools that we have applied to. The enrolment policies categorise the children and give preference to children who are of the same religion as the patron of the schools. Proof of religious membership is required. In addition, if we did manage to secure a place for him in a religious school, the religious ethos of the school permeates the entire school day without practical options to opt out.

In total for 2015/2016 I have tried to apply to 13 schools... I am clear from the experience I have had in 2015, that the situation is not likely to change for my son next year and it is therefore likely he will have no school place within reasonable distance of our home. The experience has caused significant stress and anxiety for our family, for a prolonged duration of time. My husband and I have been under enormous pressure to baptise our son against our conscience in order to secure a school place for him. It makes us very angry that our children do not have equal opportunities to access suitable education and that our children are not treated as equal citizens.

I have been left with no choice but to campaign for an Educate Together school to open in our area for 2016. The campaign involves huge amount of work and takes up much of our family time together. We have no guarantee this campaign will be successful. Parents should not have to work this hard for the basic human right to send our children to school.” - Nikki Murphy, mother from Terenure, Dublin 6W.

“Our children are not baptised and the local school prioritises Catholic children. The third question on the initial enrolment form (after name and date of birth) was whether the child would be taking the sacraments. This came above address, essential health and development information. We answered honestly and did not secure a place. We ultimately chose to move our family to a neighbouring town where there is a school that accepts children of all faiths and none on the same footing.” – Elizabeth Hayes, mother.

“Our daughter is bottom of the list in our local schools, as they are religious ethos schools even though they are state funded. She is unlikely to secure a place due to them being oversubscribed. Although she has an equal opportunity to attend educate together schools, the school closest to us is oversubscribed for the year she would need to attend. We will probably have to pay for a private primary school. Our friends have had their children baptised to 'jump the queue' even though they are not religious. We don't want to have to do this. I have contacted the minister for equality and minister for education neither of whom will condemn the current situation or commit to changing it.” – Identity withheld.

“Although I had read about the unfairness of the system it is truly shocking to experience it yourself. It didn't matter that we had put our daughter down 5 years in advance. Even if we had the money to pay for private school, it didn't matter. She only got a place in St. Louis due to timing, she would have been bumped down the list by baptised kids.” – Trish Scanlon, mother.

*“Frustrating. Disheartening. Worrying.
Limited schools will even take my daughter's name (she would start school in 3 years) as she is not baptized.
Some "catholic" run schools will take her name but tell us chances are limited, she will be further down on the list.
This means the few non-denominational schools that are anywhere near where we live have huge waiting lists. And I am worrying years ahead of her starting school about how we will get her to school in another neighbourhood.
It is another very worrying aspect of our lives as parents trying to work full time, pay bills and raise children.” – Identity withheld.*

“We are parents of 3 children currently in the Irish school system. We had little practical alternative but to send our children to the nearest school to us which is Catholic. We expressed our wish to the school that our children not attend First Communion preparation as they would not be making the sacrament. We found there was no educational alternative during these times and our children had to sit at the back of the class while Communion preparation was carried out. They also had to attend the Catholic church with their class as part of the same preparation. We believe that we cannot remove our children from religious instruction in a meaningful way and that the State should not be supporting an education system that allows such discrimination to occur.” – Mark O Driscoll & Fiona Dunlea, parents from Dublin.

“As a parent I am approaching the first steps to my daughter's education with some anxiety and trepidation. My and my husband's decision not to make a choice for our daughter about her religion will very likely result in her being discriminated against by the school we'd like her to attend, which is one kilometre from our home. The school is oversubscribed so asks for baptism certificates when allocating places. Like most parents, education is extremely

important to us and we think all parents should be able to approach their child's education with positivity rather than the sense of dread perpetuated by the current system.

As a four year old I was discriminated against because my parents had chosen not to have me baptised. They had to fight hard to get me into a local school and found it hard not to acquiesce to the suggestion that they go and have me baptised for the sole purpose of enrolment. Many parents are afraid to fight and have their child singled out before they've even set foot inside the classroom, so they baptise their children quietly in order to access the school of their choice. I find it reprehensible that the current system forces parents to go so far astray from their usual morals in order to access what they have a fundamental right to.

As a teacher it is hard to reconcile my belief in open and inclusive education with many (state funded) schools' admission policies. A high number of teachers are deeply, if privately, uncomfortable with section 7(3)(c). I hope a public conversation can give teachers an opportunity to express their views on this pertinent matter, and to help bring about the changes so urgently needed.” – Identity withheld.

“I am an Indian-Irish father. I came to Ireland six years ago, my wife has been here for 10 years. My daughter was born in Ireland. I was finding it impossible to get a school place for her. I approached three authorities: the Minister of Justice, Minister of Education and Arch Bishop of Dublin. I got a call from the office of Arch Bishop enquiring about the problem. I explained them the reason behind my daughter not getting admission in the nearby schools is because of her being a Hindu. He offered me a solution: “To make your daughter’s admission easy and quick, why don't you baptise her?” meaning convert your religion. I was furious and when I started arguing he hung up the phone.” – Roopesh Kumar Panicker, father from South Dublin.