

Editorial

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Report of the Special Education Review Committee is that it has appeared at all.

Prior opinion (amounting in places to paranoia) had it that the document would have the status of an internal Departmental write-up only. At best, it might be leaked or grudgingly released in typescript form to those who made formal submissions to the Committee. Its publication, under Government imprimatur, on Monday 15 November 1993, in presentation terms at any rate, was a pleasant revelation. Even more remarkably, along with the dissemination of the Report, came an invitation from the Minister to the 186 individuals and organisations who contributed comments and proposals to assist the Committee in its deliberations, to attend a seminar in order to respond to the "Purple Book" and to make their views known. The half-day seminar held on Monday 6 December 1993 in Dun Laoghaire, following a format set in train by the forum assemblies on the Green Paper earlier in the year, was in itself an historic recognition of the honourable and eminent role of special educators and practitioners in this country and their place in the policy making process. It would be churlish to dismiss the consultative overtures in the Dun Laoghaire Seminar as a Departmental public relations exercise.

The Report, as a product, merits the most careful scrutiny of its contents but it is even more important to focus on the emerging process of educational policy development, including the consultative procedures, of which the Report is but a part. The most notable, and unprecedented, of these recent trends was the Education Convention instituted by the Minister and which operated over a two week period in Dublin Castle in October 1993. The purpose of the Convention was to provide a consultative forum on the wider issues relating to the future development of education in Ireland pointed to in the Green Paper. Disconcertingly, the session allocated to special education issues had to be abruptly, and with some embarrassment, cancelled due to the non-arrival of the scheduled presenter - the Chairperson of the Special Education Review Committee, Mr Declan Brennan. An opportunity to place special educational concerns within the broader context of Irish education was regrettably lost. It was a poor prelude to the publication of the Report.

It is better, however, to highlight the happier things. For the first time, a Minister for Education has turned the spotlight on special education, has propelled the delivery of a comprehensive Report on this complex question, has called for informed comment and, by all accounts, is prepared to listen and take note. Clearly the outcome of the process remains to be seen. The jury may still be out, but it is well to remind ourselves that, we, the frontline personnel, in partnership with parents and other professionals, are enjoined to be the jurors.

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