

## Editorial

Two years ago this June, the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, announced the appointment of a Special Education Review Committee to report and make recommendations on the educational provision for children with special needs. The Review Committee is now, at the time of going to press, bringing its deliberations to a conclusion and its report is expected by July at the latest.

The fourfold terms of reference of the Committee (reported in REACH 5,1) encompassed considerations concerning (a) identification and assessment; (b) arrangements for integrated or segregated educational settings; (c) provision of support services; and, (d) Inter-Departmental links. Criticism was made in this journal and elsewhere of the lack of second level representation in the original Committee's composition. Happily this aspect was addressed by the Minister and the Committee was broadened to take account of this. Nevertheless, the under-representation of practicing teachers on the SERC remained a worrying feature for those who only watch and wait. The apparent sidestepping of any philosophical foundation work before focusing on service delivery structures was also seen as an unpromising indicator. Asking "why?" before "how?" can be a time consuming exercise but is a process best done at the beginning. The *Green Paper* was widely criticised for its lack of explicit philosophical content. As was pointed out in REACH 6,2, however, this by no means meant that the philosophical imperatives were absent from the document. The *Green Paper* has been castigated for its underlying emphasis on consumerism, enterprise culture and success ethic. What thinking will inform the conclusions of the Special Education Review Committee? Will its principles be stated plainly for all to see or will it, once again, be necessary to refer to the *Green Paper* ?

Will the report be published at all? Unlike the *Green Paper*, there is no specific understanding that the report of the SERC will assume the status of a discussion document. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the SERC Report might be regarded as simply fleshing out the principle of policy crystallised in the *Green Paper* under the terms of the EC Council of Ministers of Education Resolution of 1990 which stated that integration would be "accelerated in all appropriate cases on the basis of individual assessment, and provided that good quality education can be maintained" (*Green Paper*, p.61). This being so, the details of the SERC Report with regard to service provision might, conceivably, be fed directly, without an intervening process of discussion and consultation, into the White Paper to be published by the end of the year.

This would be a retrograde move. The "integration" of special needs considerations into a general legislative framework for education must be no less deliberate and far-reaching than the on-the-ground actuality. The time might even come when only a Special Needs Education Act would fit the bill.

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