

Editorial

The Green Paper on Education is to be welcomed. It is well to remind ourselves that it is not presented to us as a Trojan Horse, beguiling us superficially with noble aspirations but bearing an inner cargo of predetermined and predictable disappointment, if not doom. It is a discussion document. The proposals, as the Minister declares in the Foreword, "are intended to initiate a wide national debate - among education professionals, parents, and all who have a commitment to the quality of education". So it's over to us.

It is true that we in Ireland are not used to such expansive invitations to engage co-operatively in educational policy making. Only twenty years ago the Minister for Education could declare baldly that "there is nothing of such a complicated nature in our policy that would demand an elaborate White Paper to explain it" (*Dáil Debates*, 259, c 876, 2 March 1972). When a White Paper on Educational Development finally did appear in 1980 it proved to be a profound disappointment in terms of explaining policy direction, let alone promoting professional dialogue towards policy change. It is understandable then, that the Green Paper 1992 is greeted with a degree of wariness.

Special educational needs and educational disadvantage are dealt with in the Green Paper in the context of equality of opportunity. It is important, therefore, that we consider special education proposals in the context of the range and quality of educational opportunity envisaged for *all* our children. Twenty five years ago, the pragmatic introduction of free access to secondary education did not ameliorate inequality in Irish education. Inadequate planning, inappropriate curricula, misguided methodology and minimal resources remained as dispiriting barriers in the face of a massive generational rise in educational and human need. What is the philosophical groundbase from which the proposals of the Green Paper take seed? Though foundational principles, values and assumptions are not spelled out in the document, it would be a mistake to conclude that such matters have been marginalised or overlooked. In considering the *quality* of education that must hallmark our concern for the future of our children with special needs, it is vital that special educationalists, above all, engage the Green Paper with these questions.

The appointment of Niamh Bhreathnach as Minister for Education in the new Government is also to be welcomed. As a former teacher in special needs education, the Minister will undoubtedly approach her task with an experience and perspective that must illuminate and vivify the equality implications in the Green Paper. It may not be too optimistic to hope that special education in Ireland might see a new dawn.

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Editor