

Editorial

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things that can be said about the Green Paper on Education is that it has appeared at all. (At the time of going to press - May 1992 - only the introductory document has been available for perusal).

Very many people were convinced that because of the combination of Cabinet changes and the nature of the nettle to be grasped, nothing of consequence would materialise. The last time an Irish Parliament produced a major document pursuant to extensive educational change was just two hundred years ago. The proposals of the 1791 Education Inquiry Report were so controversial that the document was never published. Granted, the situation in Ireland was somewhat different to today. Then, as now, however, the issues of educational disadvantage and inequality of opportunity, coupled with utilitarian economics, were major considerations.

What does the Green Paper have to say about special education? The statements recognising the flexible nature of special needs and the necessity to allow for "a higher than proportionate share of resources" in providing for children with disabilities, while unremarkable, are nevertheless to be welcomed. These things have been said in government documents before. Should the detailed consideration of integration and related matters however, be "segregated" to the yet-to-be-revealed deliberations of the Review Committee on Special Education? Are the wider implications of addressing special needs at both primary and secondary level to be regarded as fringe issues? It looks like we are still in a state of suspension "while we await the report" (O'Mahony).

The importance of "Making Contact" - the theme of the **Fourth Annual Conference on Special Education** - does not only apply to the activities of children. Barriers need to be broken between schools and teachers themselves, who, all too often, are confined to limiting situations and categories of service exclusive to the wider needs of the educational community. If education is to address the issues of disadvantage and inequality, the prejudices and assumptions at the very heart of our educational system must be seriously challenged.

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Editor