

Editorial

The supreme position accorded to parents by the Irish Constitution has been proclaimed so often that it has practically attained cliché status.

In reality, parents, to whom church and state acknowledged primary rights in education, were effectively precluded from participating in either the policy or process of the educational system in this country until very recently. The establishment by the Minister for Education of the National Parents' Council in 1985, constituted the first major step in the recognition of parents as equal partners with teachers, administrators and clergy in the educational forum. It is a status that the forthcoming Green Paper on Education is likely to endorse and amplify.

In special education, despite the shaping of the system by vested interests (McDonnell), parents have for many years pioneered a path of partnership with particular vision and energy. The unique imperative of the parent-professional bond in the education of children with special needs promotes the on-going quest for more positive and supportive inter-relations (Garvey and Niall). Very many schools, organisations, support systems, and pre-school and post-school centres exist today because of parental effort and enterprise. As a recent example, departmental recognition and support for the resourced integration of children with Down's Syndrome in local schools emanated from the fortitude and determination of the parents who funded the original pilot scheme (Dunne).

Some of the most challenging thinking on the question of integration has been voiced recently in the PAM (Parents' Association for people with a Mental Handicap) Policy Document *Health Cuts Do Hurt the Handicapped* published in December 1991. Integration may be the ideologically 'correct' principle for politicians (and educators) to assume, but for parents deeply involved in the issue, it is the right to choose that matters; a special school *might* possess the superior resources and environment that would help a child progress to his/her full potential. To quote the document (p.20): " It might be better if a number of specified national schools concentrated on getting the extra teachers and developing the expertise needed to deal with children in the moderate range of handicap. This might inhibit the child's integration in his/her own community but might leave him less isolated. Being the only person with a handicap in a school isn't always such fun." It is to be hoped that opinions such as these will be considered seriously by the current Review Committee on Special Education.

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Editor