

Notes of the Amalgamation Review Committee Meeting Monday 18th May 2009

Attendance: Liam O'Dwyer, Regina O'Connell, Val Quinn, Janet O'Shaughnessy, Miriam McNally, Mark O'Leary, Catherine Troy, Loretta Wynn, Frankie Berry, Brenda Egan, Paula Keenan, Nora Duggan, Maura Buckley, Declan Keane, Barry Glennon and Eoin O'Mahony.

Apologies: Jason Maguire

Agenda

The agenda as circulated was approved.

Notes of March meeting

The notes of the meeting of the 30th of March were reviewed and deemed accurate. The note taker asked to step down from the position due to the complexity of trying to participate and take meeting notes at the same time. Also the notes of the March meeting had been circulated prior to her final sign off.

Matters arising

It was discussed that names had appeared on the notes of the meeting of the 30th of March which was not the policy of the Committee. It was explained that the names in question (Liam and Eoin) were inserted since Eoin was responding to direct questions about the research, and Liam to direct questions about CIDP policy. These two names will be the only two quoted in the future.

Eoin O'Mahony Presentation

The Chairperson asked Eoin to present his latest draft report and to focus on the changes since the last meeting.

Eoin signalled that there were two key changes namely an executive summary and the staff questionnaire results. The executive summary is there for interested parties who want to get an overview of the report and includes the recommendations and next steps.

The staff questionnaire while referred to in great detail in the report did raise the following issues:

- Desire for two co educational schools (Primary/Secondary)
- The location of the school or schools is seen as critical
- Concern over the jobs of staff
- Concern about how ISL is used in both schools
- Perceived differences between both post primary schools in terms of their educational focus
- That amalgamation should take place on the best method of servicing specialised Deaf education in Ireland
- That amalgamation should take place but over a period of time
- Future resourcing of the amalgamated schools in terms of equipment, IT, size of rooms etc seen as critical
- Staffing is too low down CIDP agenda instead there is a rush to amalgamate

Feedback:

- On Page 45 the sentence on St. Mary's staff placing less store on securing specialised Deaf education to be removed and re worded
- The Next steps bullet six relating to relationship between the decision to amalgamate and additional buildings is not backed by evidence in the report. In response, this was deemed necessary by Eoin O'Mahony to facilitate a decision in principle to be taken.
- The suggestion in the report on the need for two schools (one primary and one secondary) is not directly researched, and may raise technical issues with the Department of Education. This could have significant implications for staff. It was recognised that this would be examined in greater detail if the amalgamation process is to go ahead.
- The section reviewing the parents' questionnaire needs to be amended to reflect the fact that primary school children have no subject choice.
- Page 45 relating to the current provision, needs to be amended, to reflect the fact that St. Mary's also provides FETAC courses up to an including level 5 and post primary certificate PLC courses. It was agreed that such programmes in the future would be best provided in the proposed 'Life Long Learning Centre'.
- One member felt that the reasons to amalgamate need to be clarified in one section of the report including the advantages for the schools.
- There was a strong view that the need to clarify the location of the school or schools was vital especially given the current position (Option J) of the CIDP plan which places the amalgamated school on St. Joseph's current site.
This point was responded to by Liam on behalf of CIDP. He clarified that the only reason St. Joseph's is shown and costed was to give an estimate of the type of costs that would be required with Phase two including additional buildings, and to give a pictorial view of the relationship between school and village i.e. the distance separating both. On every occasion he had presented Option J he had reiterated that the Rosary and Marian sites together with the St. Joseph's site were all still in the frame. The final decision on the location of the school(s) will only be taken when the modal of provision is agreed and the cost implications weighed up. It was reiterated at every stage that nothing in Phase one would undermine Phase two of the project which could only proceed once the amalgamation issue was decided.
- There had been a staff meeting in St. Mary's and while the staff are supportive of the amalgamation they need clarity over; improved resources, location, need for parental and student choice regarding subjects, the choice of oral and sign, the continuance of academic standards, the types of buildings to be used, the need to have amalgamation taking place simultaneously across the schools and critically no job losses. A note on this view would be circulated to the Committee. This view was supported by the St. Mary's Board of Management.
- Following some discussion on this point it was commented that St. Joseph's staff have similar views and concerns especially about the location, about being crowded into a corner, having less classroom space, being disturbed by the Village. Both staffs were concerned about their perceived loss of ethos.

- It was commented that the loss of ethos is something that strong leadership should deal with, it would focus on the strengths of both schools including their staff. While the buildings and the locations are important, ethos will stem from the people involved.
- It was equally felt that the new education policy paper should be the catalyst in all of this because this is based on a new model of educational provision that sees the schools offer an outreach service to mainstream, to cochlear implant children, to children who need specialised language development support, and it links the schools closely with a new centre for Deaf education. This is something to build a future on.
- Another comment was that maybe a green field site would be would best, to start again.
- It was also suggested that it would be wiser to go to the Department of Education now to discuss their issues regarding process, jobs and posts, so that CIDP is still in a bargaining position. It was suggested that the Committee should agree in principle to the amalgamation and work ahead on the next stage in the process. Liam responded to this be saying that the Archbishop and CIDP Board had already decided in principle to go ahead with an amalgamation process of which the work of the ARC and Eoin O'Mahony was a critical first step. The role of the ARC is to advise the CIDP Board if this is the right thing to do, and if so how to proceed to the next stage.
- The meeting decided to ask Eoin O'Mahony to make the suggested amendments to his report and recirculate, to ask Liam to set out his understanding of the type of recommendations the Committee had discussed based on today's meeting. Liam will also set out the next stage in the process if there was agreement to move ahead with the process.

This material would be sent out later this week and a further meeting of the Amalgamation Review Committee will take place in St. Mary's Rosary Hall on Thursday the 28th of May from 9.30am – 10.30am