



## **“Providing Leadership through Inclusion and Diversity”**

**Keynote Address by Emily Logan, Chief Commissioner, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission**

### INTRODUCTION

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I am delighted to be here at the first day of your 35th Annual Convention, in the beautiful and historic surroundings of the Malton hotel, here in Killarney.

I am most grateful to the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools and to General Secretary Eileen Salmon for the kind invitation to address your conference today, and to share with you some thoughts and reflections on inclusion and diversity arising from the work of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

A Convention such as this is not only a forum for the Association to carry out important business, but also an opportunity to celebrate the great successes it has achieved over the past year. It is therefore a great honour to attend as the

first of your guest speakers, ahead of tomorrow's contribution by the Minister for Education and Skills.

I hope that my brief remarks this afternoon will assist in framing the discussions that follow over the coming days, and will help place the work of the ACCS in the wider context of an Ireland that is meeting the challenge of achieving inclusion and diversity in all walks of life.

#### COMPOSITION AND VISION OF THE COMMISSION

I'll begin by telling you a little about the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

The Commission was established in November 2014 as Ireland's national human rights institution and equality body, with a mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland, and to build a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in this State. We were established under new legislation, merging some of the staff and functions of the former Equality Authority and former Irish Human Rights Commission.

A crucial aspect of our composition is the focus on the principle of institutional independence in the conduct of our work, and we are fully compliant with ‘the Paris Principles’ - the United Nations standard for independence in national human rights institutions.

I am Chief Commissioner in a Commission of 15 members, all appointed by President Michael D Higgins as independent officers of the State following a resolution by both Houses of the Oireachtas, to whom we account directly. We are supported by the work of a dedicated staff of around 40 people who work across law, policy, research, and public engagement to advance human rights and equality in Ireland. Our work forms a central part of the State’s human rights and equality infrastructure.

### *IHREC and Education*

The legislation that underpins the Commission’s work provides that our broad engagement as a Commission should include working with ‘experts in education’. Enhancing and increasing our engagement with the education sector at all levels forms an important part of our strategic plan for the coming

few years, and in this context, it is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to you today.

In our current engagement with education, the Commission benefits greatly from the experience built up over the years by the work of our colleagues who came from the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission, who both conducted a range of work focussing on human rights and equality in education, on the importance of interculturalism, and on the achievement in Ireland of 'The Inclusive School'.

For example, in 2008 the Equality Authority began work with second level teachers and a broad range of education bodies to develop curricular materials to support educators in teaching about and for equality, and to embed equality in school development and planning.

Indeed, one of the earliest outputs of our new Commission was a publication in August 2015 that built on this great work: a training programme for staff and teachers in Yellow Flag Schools which explored the importance of respecting and accommodating diversity in education, and outlined some of the means of

promoting inclusion in the school setting – from classroom practice to school-level action planning.

I will return to the work of the Commission later in this talk.

### THE EMBRACE OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY BEGINS IN SCHOOL

As the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, we have a broad mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality. Within this mandate, we recognise that the foundation on which these principles are built is laid at an early age, in school, and through the vision and leadership of educators.

The late American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich compared education to a mirror, and asked the question, what happens “when someone with the authority of the teacher describes our society and you are not in it?”

This kind of experience she said, can be disorienting: “A moment of psychic disequilibrium as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Rich quoted in the Irish Times - <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/teaching-culturally-diverse-children-is-a-challenge-for-irish-schools-1.2365124>

Today, we all share a goal to ensure that when students look into the mirror that the education system holds before them, they see reflected the diversity and values of our broad society.

You, as educators, know this challenge well. You see at first hand the moments where children from different backgrounds cannot see their lived experiences reflected in the curriculum or in the life of the school, and the distance that can create. Part of your role as educators is to bridge that distance in the school environment, in real time, and through bringing your experience to bear on how the curriculum is developed in the future.

Professor Conor Gearty writes beautifully about human rights principles containing within them an ‘emancipatory potential’. Recognition of diversity and promoting inclusion are fundamental elements underpinning human rights, allowing us to tap into this potential.

Diversity recognises that individuals and groups are different, that groups of people can be differentiated from each other based on certain characteristics, some of which may be more visible than others, and that diversity exists within groups. Diversity is beneficial. Articles abound about the huge benefits of

diversity and inclusive practices in the global workplace, where diversity of teams and boards are held up as exemplars and cited as being hugely positive in terms of financial performance, worker retention and staff performance.

But in the educational sphere, we too often we see discussion of diversity cast in less-positive, more-hesitant terms – diversity as a challenge, diversity as a problem, diversity as a source of uncertainty.

Schools – their management and their teachers - are in the unique position to change that narrative, and recognise that the diversity of our classrooms today reflects the diversity of our society and workplaces tomorrow. Schools can move the discussion beyond stereotypes and limited expectations, and give young people the confidence, support and ability they need to overcome the wider barriers society can put in their way.

The Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools is particularly well-placed where this is concerned. The Association has a tradition of leadership in education. It was born of the need for a new approach – taking the best from the academic and the vocational, and fusing them. The Association also has at its core the principle of inclusivity in its work, confidently asserting a vision of

‘contributing towards a just and caring society’, and seeking to run schools with a community focus ‘genuinely reflective of the diversity of their communities’.

The ACCS, and Ireland’s Community and Comprehensive schools, are therefore crucial advocates for inclusion and diversity in our education system, and into the future can play an important leadership role in promoting diversity and inclusion for the benefit of schools and pupils alike.

#### THE CHANGED LANDSCAPE OF POST PRIMARY EDUCATION IN IRELAND TODAY

I would like to now reflect on some of the recent and anticipated changes in the makeup of Irish society – and of the Irish classroom - that will demand more leadership and innovation from professional educators such as members of the ACCS.

I won’t tell you when I attended secondary school, but I can tell you that the classroom environment was a fairly homogenous one - a world apart from the classroom of today. There was diversity, of course, but often it was cloaked or hidden, or went unacknowledged. The only time an ethnic minority face



appeared in the classroom was on international development campaign posters.

Today, Ireland's classrooms are very different, for **reasons of demography, of visibility and of expectation.**

**The most obvious change has related to the demographic effects of migration.** The past two decades have seen a fundamental change in the makeup of Irish society, to which inward migration has significantly contributed.

This trend continues. According to the CSO, net inward migration by non-Irish nationals grew for the fourth year in a row in 2016, from 11,600 to 13,800. Migration from outside the EU is a particular feature today, accounting for 40.1% of total migration into Ireland in 2016.

As the ESRI outlined earlier this month in its newly published Integration Monitor on Ireland, with a diversity of nationalities and ethnicities comes diverse needs, situations and experiences. From the classroom onwards, this reality needs to feature in our planning for the future.

**There has also been a profound change in recent years in the visibility of various more marginalised groups in Irish society** - people who were always in the classroom but were often invisible, ignored or isolated.

Those students include children with disabilities and special educational needs, LGBT children, children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, and Traveller children. An older generation will recall that for many such children, their educational experience was characterised by difference, exclusion and marginalisation.

This is changing for the better, as the embrace of inclusion and diversity become a more standard part of school leadership, teacher training and classroom practice. There is, of course, a great deal more work to do.

**And then there is a change in the expectations of both students and parents about educational outcomes and its positive impact on lifetime horizons.**

Children with disabilities do not expect to be institutionalised, gender expectations do not limit professional horizons in the way that they once did, and Traveller children can set their sights on higher learning.

There remains, though, some significant distance between expectation and reality.

For example, the ESRI's recent report on outcomes for Travellers revealed that while the majority of non-Travellers aged 25-34 have completed second level education (86 per cent), fewer than one in ten Travellers in this age group have done so (9 per cent). The ESRI, in fact, concluded that since the 1960s, education outcomes for Travellers have proportionally disimproved by comparison to the majority population.

One hopes that the recent formal acknowledgement by Taoiseach Enda Kenny that Travellers represent a specific ethnic group in Irish society will kick-start a renewed effort on the part of the state to improve outcomes for Travellers in our society.

The changes I've outlined briefly here serve to remind us that the classroom of my youth, is in all senses a classroom of the past. It also serves to remind us that schools and classrooms are not neutral learning spaces. They are dynamic civic spaces, important locales where diversity intersects with the formation of young people. How that intersection occurs depends very much on how the school culture is shaped and defined. And this, in turn, depends very much on you – educators and school management.

### INTERCULTURALISM

Much of the demographic change I have just touched upon is tied up with the wider theme of interculturalism. Indeed, one of the Commission's statutory functions is to encourage intercultural understanding and good practice in intercultural relations.

At its most basic, intercultural understanding involves us moving one step beyond the concept of the 'multicultural'. It means acknowledging that a modern country like Ireland is host to a diversity of cultures; that cultural identity matters; and that disparaging, erasing or ignoring it can cause harm.

Interculturalism, particularly in education, means more than just respecting ethnic diversity. It is about interaction, understanding and participation. It is about inclusion by design and planning, not as an add-on.

The OECD in a recent paper from 2015<sup>2</sup> has highlighted the importance of the education system in fostering effective integration, stating

*“The way in which education systems respond to migration has an enormous impact both on whether or not migrants are successfully integrated into their host communities and on the economic and social well-being of all members of the communities they serve, whether they have an immigrant background or not.”*

The majority of non-Irish nationals are today first generation immigrants who will have completed their education outside of Ireland with their children now in Irish schools. Their background means they will have little experience or knowledge of Irish education systems and approaches. It also means they bring new challenges to our classrooms when they arrive into the post-primary system.

One of the most fundamental of these challenges is of course that of language. There are today almost 50,000 pupils at primary level who do not have English or Irish as their mother tongue. The ESRI this month pointed out that Children whose families speak a language other than English or Irish have significantly lower reading scores as they prepare for post primary entry.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cited in the ESRI Monitoring Report on Integration 2016 <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-report-on-integration-2016/>

The Government's Intercultural Education Strategy (2010- 2015) aimed to facilitate an educational experience respectful of diversity, while assisting education providers to ensure that integration becomes the norm within an intercultural learning environment. However, monitoring and implementation of this strategy was severely impacted by austerity measures and the disbandment of the Department of Education Integration Unit.<sup>3</sup>

Given this setback, it was very positive to see the Department of Justice and Equality this year launch its new migrant integration strategy,<sup>4</sup> which has set out specific actions in the area of Education.

These include:

- An annual monitoring of school enrolment policies to assess their effect on migrant students;
- Proactive efforts to attract migrants into teaching positions;
- A review of the adequacy of language supports, and the delivery of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and follow on programmes;
- Assessing the effectiveness of training for teachers in managing diversity;

---

<sup>3</sup> ESRI Monitoring Report 2016 Page 42 - <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-report-on-integration-2016/>

<sup>4</sup> Migrant Integration Strategy [http://www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/JWKY-AJEE6A1021139-en/\\$File/Migrant\\_Integration\\_Strategy\\_English.pdf](http://www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/JWKY-AJEE6A1021139-en/$File/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf)

- Work to encourage migrant parent’s participation in the school life of their children;
- And the fostering and development of positive attitudes towards diversity and celebrating difference as part of the school curriculum.

These measures, if implemented, will make a much-needed contribution to intercultural understanding in our Education system.

Of course, ACCS schools are already putting into practice the process of building positive attitudes and intercultural understanding. I was reading in your most recent ACCS newsletter<sup>5</sup> of St. Kilian’s Community School in Bray which hosted its third annual Multicultural Day in January, a whole-school event, built on months of work by teachers, parents and students alike. It was wonderful to read of the pride felt by students and teachers in their celebration of the thirty nationalities represented in the school.

Work like this shows that children and young people can themselves be the leaders in embracing inclusion and diversity, and that inclusion and diversity practiced in the classroom go on to resonate in the home, and broadly in our society.

---

<sup>5</sup> ACCS Newsletter <http://www.accs.ie/cmsAdmin/uploads/accs-newsletter-3-2016-2017.pdf>

## THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL<sup>6</sup>

A dedication to interculturalism is part and parcel of the wider drive towards the idea of the Inclusive School.

For the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, achieving the “inclusive school” is a crucial element in embedding principles of equality and human rights from the earliest stages of a young person’s formation.

We view the “inclusive school” as a one which *“prevents and combats discrimination, respects values and accommodates diversity. It seeks positive experiences, a sense of belonging and outcomes for all students including access, participation, personal development and achieving education credentials.”*<sup>7</sup>.

The idea of the Inclusive School is grounded not only in the values of equality enshrined in the Constitution and woven into our Equality legislation. It also has a solid grounding in international human rights law, and in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Ireland is a signatory.

---

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.sdpi.ie/Equality\\_Authority\\_materials/Equality\\_and\\_Education-Conference\\_2001\\_\(with\\_ASTI\).pdf](http://www.sdpi.ie/Equality_Authority_materials/Equality_and_Education-Conference_2001_(with_ASTI).pdf)

<sup>7</sup> IHREC Intercultural Training for Yellow Flag Schools – August 2015



The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,<sup>8</sup> who just last year reviewed Ireland’s record under the Convention, have some very insightful things to say about the Aims of Education from a human rights perspective. They stress that the Convention requires that states foster school environments that: *“reflect the freedom and the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”*.

This is a vision of education which, I think you would agree, very much aligns with the vision and mission of the ACCS.

### SOME OF THE INGREDIENTS FOR AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

Achieving the Inclusive School is not about bricks and mortar. Creating a sense of ownership and belonging across a diversity of identities relies on people within the school building - their practices, their leadership and their actions. An inclusive school cannot be static – it needs to be adaptable, and responsive to our society as it changes.

---

<sup>8</sup> IHREC CRC Submission December 2015 - [https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/ireland\\_and\\_the\\_united\\_nations\\_convention\\_on\\_the\\_rights\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf](https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/ireland_and_the_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf) . Also see UNCRC General Comment No 1 on Art 29 – The Aims of Education.

In addition, it relies on a constellation of necessary reforms and realignments beyond the boardroom, and beyond the school gates.

I would like to touch on some of the areas in which such change is needed, and in which the Commission has taken a particular interest in recent months and years. These include the questions of School Admissions; Diversity in teaching; and Participation.

### ***School Admissions***

The Commission, as part of its mandate to review legislation, has closely followed the passage of the Education (Admissions to School) Bill 2016, and has commented at length on the human rights and equality considerations that it raises.

As a Commission our recommendations on the Bill covered four overarching areas:

- Religion as a criterion for admission: we recommend that the Equal Status Act be amended to give effect to the principle that no child should be given preferential access to a publicly funded school on the basis of their religion
- Religion in school after admission: we recommend that outside the context of faith formation, regard should be had to providing

information in relation to religion in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner

- How previous connections to the school are dealt with as a criterion for admission: we recommend prohibition of the use of a connection with a former student of the school as a criterion in the admission
- We recommend that the principle of the best interests of the child is the primary standard on which decisions around admission and designation are based.

We also, more generally, recommend that the Education Act be amended so that all schools, in setting out their characteristic spirit and general objectives, shall ensure that the values of an inclusive school that respects and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation are respected.

These amendments, if reflected in the Bill, will make a significant contribution to promoting diversity and inclusion in Irish schools.

Take, for example, the question of a link to a former student.

We as a Commission acted as *amicus curiae* – or friend of the court – in the 2015 Stokes case at the Supreme court. The case concerned a boy, a member of the Traveller community, who claimed, through his mother, that he was

indirectly discriminated against by reason of the admissions policy of a school. The school's admission policy prioritised applicants on the basis of satisfying three criteria: first, being a Catholic, second, attending a certain named primary school and; third, having a father or sibling who attended the school. Although the boy met the first two criteria, he did not meet the third.

The Stokes case brought to the surface a genuine challenge to diversity and inclusion in schools that goes beyond the specific experience of Traveller students. Schools admissions policies have been shown to have an impact not only Travellers, but can have an undue impact on new migrant communities, those of minority faiths or none, children with disabilities, and people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.

School admission is a live issue and a real challenge to inclusion. A significant proportion of the calls the Commission receives to our public information service are from parents, confused and frustrated when their children cannot gain a place in a local school.

We have called on the Minister for Education and Oireachtas Members to work to ensure that the final Act ensures equality for all young people in accessing our education system, and that it respects and accommodates diversity.

### ***Diversity in Teaching***

Beyond the question of school admissions, are also other systemic questions about the make-up of our schools.

While the demographic changes I discussed earlier are evident in the classroom, this diversity has yet to be reflected within the teaching profession. A crucial element to leading on diversity and inclusion in our schools is to have a cohort of teachers, educators and school managers who reflect the diversity of society today. This is an area in which much work remains to be done, and which we as a Commission have raised in our recent work at United Nations level.

Currently, there are far more women than men working as teachers, while in senior management of schools, we conversely see far more men than women.

Minorities, persons with disabilities or LGBT people do not make up a representative proportion of our teaching profession, and those who are in the profession are not necessarily visible in a way that offers students leadership and role models for inclusion.

NUI Galway's project on Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE)<sup>9</sup> is doing some excellent work in this area, gathering the data required to get a picture and profile of the diversity in initial teacher education today. The Galway

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nuigalway.ie/colleges-and-schools/arts-social-sciences-and-celtic-studies/education/research/linktoprojects/ircdiversityininitialteachereducationditeinireland/>

researchers have noted that 92-98 per cent of trainee teachers at undergraduate and postgraduate levels claim Irish nationality, and more than 95 per cent are “white Irish”.

This kind of work is vital in seeing what draws people to Initial Teacher Education, and allowing entry procedures and selection criteria for teacher training programmes to be assessed. With this information in hand we can explore ways of facilitating entry to the profession by under-represented groups, and actually asking people from those groups what they need to encourage them into the profession.

### ***Participation as central to diversity and inclusion***

Our ambition for the Inclusive School needs to go beyond a focus on the presence of diversity in the school. It must also place a premium on participation.

Participation covers a wide range of elements within the life of a school, including:

- The full range of learning experiences available in the school
- The various sets of relationships that make up and drive school life
- Decision making processes, and

- Cultural initiatives that seek to shape and define the norms and values of the school.

The Inclusive School must create opportunities for participation by everyone, regardless of their background. It must acknowledge that special efforts may be required to assist certain cohorts in getting involved.

The principle of participation is about asking ourselves critically who makes decisions, who has a voice, what voices are absent, and why.

Participation can be based on a whole of school approach – enshrined in the mission and ethos of the school. It can inform the school as employer, and set expectations of the staff as leaders.

Participation means engagement with parents, including from minority ethnic groups whose first language is not that of the school. It means engaging the school in the wider community.

And participation can be given meaning for young people through the active fostering of student councils, as provided for under the 1998 Education Act. School Councils are a crucial means to further student involvement and participation in their school, and a natural home for student leadership on inclusion and diversity.

It is clear that schools represented by the ACCS are tapping into the potential that active participation holds. This is evident in the wonderful work of St. Kilian’s Community School in Bray, which I touched on earlier. It is also evident in the fantastic achievements of Portmarnock Community School and their very impressive award-winning ‘Global Citizens – Mapping the Future’ project, which the conference will hear more about tomorrow.

### PUBLIC SECTOR DUTY AND EDUCATION

Before I conclude, I would like to briefly touch on the role of the Public Sector Duty in the field of education and the use that the Association and its member schools might make of it in forging a leadership role in inclusion and diversity.

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (IHREC Act 2014) places a positive duty on public sector bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights, in their daily work. This is referred to as the Public Sector Duty.

The Public Sector Duty requires bodies to take pro-active steps through policies, plans and actions to address human rights and equality issues relevant to their purpose and functions.



The Public Sector Duty obligation provides schools with an opportunity to take a whole school approach to human rights and equality, taking into account the school mission, the school culture, development and implementation of school strategies, policies and practices, engagement with staff and students, as well as the curriculum, teaching methodologies and teaching materials.

Implementing the Public Sector Duty in schools can support positive engagement of staff and students; help to reduce inequalities and advance human rights; identify issues at the level of the school and the classroom before they become a problem; encourage creative and practical ways to deal with issues that arise; and celebrate diversity and inclusion. In short, the Public Sector Duty provides a useful focal point to address the range of issues I have touched on in today's talk, and I would encourage the ACCS to engage with us at the Commission further to explore how you can make use of it in your work.

## CONCLUSION

The responsibility to address inequality in our society, and to show leadership in through inclusion and diversity, does not rest solely with Ireland's educators. But it is undeniable that Ireland's schools have a fundamental part to play in

fostering principles of inclusion that find their expression in the world beyond the classroom.

And the ACCS, with its commitment to a just society and an inclusive learning environment, is showing clear leadership in this regard.

As the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission we hope to witness an evolving relationship with all partners in the education sector to build and share experience, knowledge and learning. In that spirit, I hope my talk here today will be the first of many opportunities for us to work together.

I thank you again for doing me the honour of asking me to address you today, and I wish you a very successful weekend of work at this year's Convention.