

IFI Statement

Re: Article by Patsy McGarry – “Call for State schools to accommodate Islamic beliefs”

The Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI) would like to comment on the article by Patsy McGarry – “*Call for State Schools to accommodate Islamic beliefs*” on the 3rd September last as follows.

Dr. Ali Salim does not speak on behalf of the IFI, which through its patron and education board is the official body for Islamic education in Ireland as recognised by the Department of Education. As the longest Islamic body in Ireland (since 1959), we further refute his opinions and can confidently assert that such opinions are neither shared by the IFI nor the majority of participating members in the Islamic community here.

We further wish to assert that the Irish community and the Irish schools have been more than accommodating to the Muslim students over the years. As patron we have enjoyed cordial cooperation and liaisons with other management bodies. It has at times supported Educate Together in their campaign for new schools and is currently affiliated with the CPSMA. There have been thousands of Muslim children who have passed through many Irish primary and secondary schools through to colleges and universities all over Ireland and are now well adjusted individuals within Irish society in practically all aspects of the workplace. Many have passed through the Educate Together schools in which both Muslim and students of other faiths and no faith have benefited from their all inclusivity style of education. The majority would have passed through the predominantly Catholic schools throughout the country. The IFI have found that Catholic school managements also have made wonderful efforts to make their schools as inclusive as possible without losing their own ethos. Indeed, they have gone beyond their boundaries to accommodate Muslim children with prayer facilities, religious festivals etc. as we are sure they have done with other minority faiths.

Whilst Dr. Salim speaks of ‘discrimination’ with regard to admissions which is mainly in the secondary level sector, he fails to acknowledge the lack of sufficient secondary school places available in South County Dublin. The D.E.S struggles to create more availability. Therefore, there is always pressure on schools and on parents seeking places. To generalise and insinuate that the same situation pertains throughout the whole of Ireland is simply not the case. Pressure for secondary school places is mainly confined to large urban areas. We are furthermore at a loss as to his insinuations on the legislation in the area of discrimination in which he talks of discrimination “despite a prohibition of discrimination on religious grounds by all recent Equal Status Acts.” As far as the IFI is aware the Equal Status Acts were left undisturbed of which section 7(3)(c) is a natural complement to section 37 of

the Employment Equality Act, 1998. We are not sure if Dr. Ali is aware that 60 submissions were submitted to the Equality Authority on this matter, including our own, i.e. on the proposed amendment to s37 of the 1998 Act, and, as far as we are aware, the matter is still at the Recommendation Paper stage.

Indeed, even at third level education there has been good relations and cooperation amongst various third level establishments including Froebel College and St. Patrick's College who have both encouraged Muslim children to apply for primary school teaching.

We would further like to point out and stress that the examples given in the article are only indicative of a very few small minority of cases, which invariably can occur with any minority communities adapting into the mainstream. Such very few incidents, that we are aware of, have always been ironed out by the individual schools themselves through their own boards of managements.

The IFI would like to take this opportunity to express their thanks to all areas in the education sector, from primary schools up to the universities, and look forward to continued cooperation and mutual respect of their colleagues in the wider education forum.