

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As parents we are extremely concerned about the Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill 2018 (Bill 34 of 2018), which, with a few small changes to our comprehensive and widely respected Education Act of 1998, proposes to change the face of education, schools, their boards and the duty of the Minister for Education. It proposes to interfere with the rights of parents as primary educators in choosing a school according to ethos and deciding upon the type of education appropriate for their children.

The enforcement of a sex education curriculum by a government is very worrying. It is the very subject that parents should have most input into. We, as parents, would like to decide the appropriate time and setting for educating our children on topics with moral gravity, like sex education, so as to give our children the best chance to become responsible people and members of society.

The increased spending needed to roll out such provisions in this bill have already been tried and have failed in other countries. See Appendix 1 for references to English studies and conversations with experts about this.

We have a lot of questions about the bill which we would like answered. The following points break down the proposed changes to the Education Bill of 1998 and the widespread effect they would have on schools, boards of management and the Education Minister.

1. Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 9(d) referring to the role of the school and parents. See Appendix 2.

- Does this mean that the intention is not to consult with parents and to over-rule the characteristic spirit of the school on which basis parents may choose a particular school for their children?

- Does this mean that the intention is to deny the rights of the parents, as per our constitution, to be the primary educators of our children in being consulted about curriculum and in choosing a school according to ethos and characteristic spirit?

2. Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 15 (2)(b) referring to the role of the board of management. See Appendix 3.

- Does this mean that the board of management of a school would be forced to change their existing duty to uphold the school ethos and instead will be manipulated by external pressures or agencies, even when the influences are not part of their educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions, as protected by our Education Act, 1998, but rather, are contrary to those values?

3. Amendment to Education Act, 1998, Section 30 which refers to the Minister for Education:

With the following subsection to be added after subsection (1):

(1A) When prescribing the curriculum for relationships and sexuality education the Minister shall ensure—

(a) the curriculum is factual and objective, age appropriate, and not gender normative,

- Definition of “factual”: “Concerned with what is actually the case” (Oxford English Dictionary).
- Definition of “objective”: “not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts” (OED).
- Who is it that decides what is objective or age appropriate and why do they get to choose?
- The delivery of such a proposed curriculum is non-objective since it is neither fair, just, impartial nor unprejudiced, and it disagrees with the fundamental beliefs of many, including many parents.
- Gender normative - If it is not gender normative, then it will not conform to the objective norms of gender in Ireland and, it will not teach the shared values of our culture.

b) the curriculum includes the following areas in a factual and objective manner:

(i) consent to sexual activity; Why are children being taught about this? Is this so as to encourage law-breaking? Increasing knowledge of risky behaviour leads to increased risky behaviour for those children who are undecided. We, as parents, do not want to create the curiosity that early sex education leads to.

(ii) the different types of sexuality; The teaching of different types of sexuality bring with it, moral implications. It is not the place of a government or school to put forward a curriculum such as this, where all sexualities are taught as valid and morally equal choices. It goes against our beliefs and not only removes our parental rights but also our religious freedom.

(iii) the different types of gender;

- Gender is either male or female - this is a biological fact.
- With regard to different types of gender, the proposition is neither accurate, correct, credible, nor scientifically verifiable.
- The belief that gender and sex are the same thing is a belief held by many millions of people from many religions and none. The traditional view is a mainstream belief that must be respected.
- Where is the proof that these different types of gender that are being proposed, are actually fact? Is this a “fact” that will change from time to time as new genders are put forward?
- The imposition of gender ideology on our children is contrary to long-established facts and to our beliefs. Teaching children these controversial theories as if they are fact amounts to indoctrination of political ideologies, which should have no place in any school. Schools are currently not required to manipulate children into believing that gender ideology is factual or morally right. If a school is to teach something that is untrue, it becomes a centre of indoctrination, not education. You have a moral obligation, as our representative, to oppose a bill which enforces indoctrination. Is this bill proposing that our children be indoctrinated with an ideology that is contrary to our beliefs and against our will?
- There is no law requiring that people must agree with gender ideology. Will the school, the school boards and the Minister for Education be forced to act as if there is?

(iv) methods of contraception; Why is this teaching being proposed for a group of people who are not legally allowed to have sex or buy contraceptives? Also - It is the belief of a large number of people that artificial contraceptives are immoral and as such, the education around contraceptives should not be imposed upon children, within the curriculum. In this proposed curriculum will the teaching of the most effective and risk-free contraception be taught? The school ethos and our religious beliefs must not be denigrated.

and (v) the termination of pregnancy; This bill was introduced in April 2018, a month before the Abortion Referendum in Ireland. The inclusion of this section is questionable at the very least. In addition to this, and very importantly, it is the belief of hundreds of thousands of people in Ireland today that the ending of life in abortion is immoral. It is an objective fact that abortion always ends a life, and as such the education around abortion should not be imposed upon children within the school curriculum. The school ethos and our religious beliefs should not be denigrated.

(c) the curriculum is delivered in a factual and objective manner in all schools regardless of the characteristic spirit of the school,

- While some of the above propositions in this bill may be deemed factual by some, they are not necessarily appropriate for teaching in our schools and absolutely not while ignoring the ethos of the school.

- Parents choose schools for their children based on ethos and characteristic spirit. There can be no exception to the aspects of school, education and school life which do not influence or aren't affected by ethos. There can be no exceptions imposed, especially when those exceptions involve forcing something immoral or untrue on the school, infringing upon the status of parents as the primary educators of their children and indoctrinating pupils with falsehoods.

(d) and the rights of students to access factual and objective education on reproductive healthcare is guaranteed, protected and upheld in all schools.”.

- What is the definition of “reproductive healthcare”? Is it referring to women having babies? Or is it a term used to hide the more sinister intention of providing education on contraception and abortion to children? How could the education around matters with such moral gravity ever be mandated for in legislation or be open to political influence? And how is it ok to force teachers to teach material with a moral view contrary to that of the parents, to impressionable young people and present it as morally good and beneficial for the flourishing of society?

- Is this proposed amendment suggesting that the rights of the students to access any questionable proposed curriculum, under the pretence of “Education on reproductive healthcare” supersedes the constitutional right of parents to be the primary educators and to decide what is suitable and appropriate education for their children?

4) Amendment to Education Act, 1998, subsection (2)(b) referring again to the role of the Minister For Education. See appendix 4.

- Would this proposed bill force the Minister of Education to ignore the ethos of a school and the rights of a parent to choose a school by its ethos, by imposing any legislated curriculum put forward under “Relationships and Sexuality Education”?

- Ethos or characteristic spirit of a school cannot be ignored and exceptions based on immoral or untrue material cannot be imposed.

This bill has been proposed by people and supported by groups who do not represent us. See appendix 5. It is also sad to see second level student groups being used to denigrate religious beliefs and rights of those who cherish and want the best for, those same second level students; their parents.

We are the primary educators of our children, this is protected in our Constitution and a God-given right, more powerful than any legislation. The law recognises the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their beliefs including during a child's education.

To propose a curriculum taught without any moral bearing or inference is utterly foolish, even if it were legal to do so without parental consent.

We don't want the elimination of individual character and ethos of our schools. We do not want the elimination of choice with regard to the education of our children and the provision of their education. We have constitutional protections which must be respected and upheld.

We are very concerned and we want answers to the questions we have posed. We look forward to receiving your response to these concerns as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix

1. Increased spending on sex education does not prevent teenage pregnancies but actually contribute to increased rates:

- Journal of Health economics 54 (2017) 135-146, “The Effect of Spending Cuts On Teen Pregnancy”. David Patona,<sup>a</sup>, Liam Wright<sup>b</sup>

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<sup>b</sup> School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, Sheffield, S1 4DA, United Kingdom

- [https://www.cochrane.org/CD006417/INFECTN\\_school-based-interventions-preventing-hiv-sexually-transmitted-infections-and-pregnancy-adolescents](https://www.cochrane.org/CD006417/INFECTN_school-based-interventions-preventing-hiv-sexually-transmitted-infections-and-pregnancy-adolescents)
- [https://www.google.com/url?q=https%3A%2F%2Ftheconversation.com%2Fkeeping-girls-at-school-may-reduce-teenage-pregnancy-and-stis-but-sex-education-doesnt-68087&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNEkZKGV\\_i-t\\_I0Gwf4\\_bfBMMKoztw](https://www.google.com/url?q=https%3A%2F%2Ftheconversation.com%2Fkeeping-girls-at-school-may-reduce-teenage-pregnancy-and-stis-but-sex-education-doesnt-68087&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNEkZKGV_i-t_I0Gwf4_bfBMMKoztw)
- <https://www.google.com/url?q=https%3A%2F%2Ftheconversation.com%2Fspending-cuts-may-have-contributed-to-falling-teenage-pregnancy-rates-77833&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNFP9uf1HON7bQ3aw8ObH2qEW0CLg>

2. Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 9(d)

9. A recognised school shall provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall use its available resources to:

(d) Promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school

The new bill proposes that Section 9(d) is amended by inserting “, with the exception of relationships and sexuality education,” after “having”.

3. Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 15 (2)(b) which requires the board of management to (b) uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school

The new bill proposes that Section 15(2) (b) of the Principal Act shall be amended by adding the words “with the exception of relationships and sexuality education,” after “upholding,”.

4. Amendment to Education Act, 1998, subsection (2)(b): the minister (for Education) shall have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school or class of school in exercising his or her functions under this section.

The bill proposes to amend this section by adding “, with the exception of relationships and sexuality education” after “section”.

5. This bill was proposed by Ruth Coppinger (Socialist Party TD) Paul Murphy and Mick Barry (People Before Profit TDs). It is supported by:

National Women's Council of Ireland

Shout Out

Daltaí 4 Choice

Rape Crisis Network

UCD Students Union

Irish Family Planning Association

BeLongTo

YouAct Europe

Irish Second Level Students Union

Atheist Ireland