

Mr Patrick Allen
Secretary
Board of Governors
Foyle College
Londonderry

31 May 2020

Dear Governors,

As Primary School Principals, we lead schools where we are committed to pastoral care, enhancing the social, physical and emotional development of our pupils and nurturing the intellectual abilities necessary for our changing world. In all these areas, we support each child to reach his/her potential.

At this time, we are particularly concerned for the pupils currently in Year 6. From mid-March these pupils have been at home and in a 'lockdown' which is likely to continue into August. This unprecedented period of isolation and home-schooling is having, and will have, an unknown impact on every pupil.

Each pupil's emotional and mental well-being is vitally important to us and the added pressure of sitting academic selection tests in November and December is inevitably adding to the stress normally associated with these tests. Anxiety levels are already raised in Year 6 homes across our country and this is reflected in the volume of calls, posts and emails from parents directed to teachers and principals in the primary sector.

We are very concerned that much of the debate around these tests has focused on organisations such as the Education Authority (EA), the Association for Quality Education (AQE), the Post Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) and the Department of Education (DE). The focus for us is on the children and what is in their best interests.

Our Year 6 pupils' education has been significantly disrupted from mid-March and there is likely to be a phased return from August / September. The normal educational experiences, teaching and learning which Year 6 and 7 pupils would have had pre-academic selection tests is evidently impossible. It is also very likely that many pupils returning from this extended absence will need additional personal and emotional support. In addition, with the possibility of a second wave of Covid-19 during the Autumn, we do not think that the normal academic tests should be carried out in these abnormal circumstances. Our young children should be afforded the same moral consideration as those who were scheduled to sit GCSE and A-Level examinations this term.

As a society we are having to review and consider how we function in this new context and the operation of unregulated academic selection tests should not be exempt from these considerations.

Primary school teachers and leaders are not in a position to make judgements on which pupils should or should not be admitted to a grammar school. We call on those with responsibility for the admission of pupils into Year 8 to review their arrangements for 2020/2021 and to prioritise the needs and well-being of the current Year 6 pupils and their families. This is a time for you to show true leadership to the communities which you serve. We appeal to you, the Principal and Boards of Governors in Foyle College, to suspend your use of the results of the AQE test for admission in September 2021.

Yours faithfully,

Londonderry Controlled Primary Principals' Group

Principals from the following primary schools:

Drumahoe PS, Ebrington PS, Lisnagelvin PS

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