**Template letter/email to TDs and Senators**

Dear [*TD/Senator name*],

I am writing to you as a constituent [and as a parent] on the subject of religious faith formation in Irish primary schools and the continuing religious dominance in the Irish education system, in the face of vastly changed (and changing) demographics.

I support the call by Education Equality for the Irish government to compel schools to confine religious faith formation and worship to a period outside core school hours, in order to uphold families’ human and constitutional rights to freedom of religion and belief and to vindicate the rights of teachers who do not wish to indoctrinate children into a faith they do not themselves hold.

As I’m sure you are aware, approximately 95% of primary schools in Ireland are under religious patronage. Around 90% of primary schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church. By contrast, the CSO census in 2023 showed that only 69% of the population identify as Roman Catholic, and when older age groups are excluded, those percentages are significantly lower. Our education system is outdated and out of sync with the realities of life in modern Ireland.

In the vast majority of these religious-run schools, religious faith formation permeates the school day. There is no effective opt out for children, with most children [(my own included)], required to remain in the classroom during faith formation. There is no consistency in how they are treated in schools across Ireland, with the Department of Education failing to provide guidelines to schools, failing to collect any data on the numbers of children opted out and failing to ensure that schools comply with their obligations under section 62(7)(n) of the Education (Admissions to Schools Act) 2018 to include details of opt out arrangements in their admissions policy.

In order to teach in such schools, teachers must hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS), which qualifies them to evangelise and indoctrinate children into the Catholic faith. This closes the door in 90% of schools to any teaching professional who is not Catholic. The discrimination permitted under section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act 1998 should be removed, as should the CCRS requirement.

The divestment programme promised by the current government has been an abject failure with only 12 schools having divested from religious patronage since 2018, the majority of which were small, unviable, rural schools.

The absence of choice and the lack of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across Ireland means that non-religious and minority faith families are thwarted at every step if they are not able to secure a place for their child in a primary school that complements their beliefs or non-beliefs as the case may be.

It is time to move religious faith formation to a class outside of core school hours.

Yours sincerely

………………………