

Atheist Ireland



To: Helen McEntee TD
Minister for Justice

8 February 2021

Minister's Reference: DJE-MD-00345-2020

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your email dated 25th January 2021. We note your comments in relation to the issues raised in our Letter of 27th August 2020. We agree that the matters that we raised are relevant to the Department of Education and the Minister for Children. They are also relevant to the Department of Justice, as they relate to freedom from discrimination, freedom of conscience, and equality before the law.

The Department's Equality Division develops policy and draft laws to improve equal opportunities and to work towards a more equal society in the area of employment and access to services, including tackling discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. It also promotes greater respect for the person and for diversity, equality and cultural difference, mainly through laws and administrative practices.

The Department's Equality Division also works with the Department of Foreign Affairs in reporting to international bodies, such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, on how Ireland is meeting our human rights targets. In their recent List of Issues the UN Human Rights Committee under the ICCPR has asked the State questions in relation to the Irish education system under Article 2 (freedom from discrimination), Article 18 (freedom of conscience) and Article 26 (equality before the law).

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1375&Lang=en

We do not believe that the Department of Justice can absolve itself of its responsibility to guarantee equality before the law and equal protection of the law without discrimination of any kind by delegating that role to the Department of Education and the Minister for Children.

In this context we ask you to reconsider our request for a meeting, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Nugent
Chairperson
Atheist Ireland

Jane Donnelly
Human Rights Officer
Atheist Ireland