

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS AGUS SCILEANNA

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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*Dé Máirt, 19 Nollaig 2017*

*Tuesday, 19 December 2017*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 4 p.m.

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The Joint Committee met at 4 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

| Teachtaí Dála / Deputies | Seanadóirí / Senators  |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Thomas Byrne,            | Trevor Ó Clochartaigh, |
| Catherine Martin,        | Lynn Ruane.            |
| Jan O'Sullivan.          |                        |

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív and Senators Gerard P. Craughwell and Brian Ó Domhnaill.

Teachta / Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

## Business of Joint Committee

**Chairman:** I call the meeting to order. Apologies have been received from Deputies Josepha Madigan, Kathleen Funchion and Tony McLoughlin and Senators Maria Byrne and Robbie Gallagher. We will now go into private session.

*The joint committee went into private session at 4.04 p.m. and resumed in public session at 4.31 p.m.*

## Island Schools: Discussion

**Chairman:** The purpose in this part of the meeting is to engage with a number of stakeholders on the challenges facing island schools. This engagement is the result of a detailed examination of the topic by our special rapporteur, Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh, who is a member of the joint committee. There is no doubt about the importance of island schools to their communities. They play an essential role in the society and culture of island communities, possibly more so than on the mainland. We will have an opportunity to focus on the challenges facing them, particularly in the provision of resources, the context of the pupil-teacher ratio and the important matter of subject choice. The hearings will to help inform a report Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh is compiling.

The delegates are all incredibly welcome. They have all made a very long journey to be with us. We really appreciate their doing so in the middle of a very busy week and very much look forward to our engagement with them.

Some members have indicated a preference to make some or all of their contributions in Irish. We absolutely accept this and have translation facilities available. On a positive note, this is the only committee room that has such facilities available. Early in the new year two more committee rooms are to be kitted out. This is very important and something members of this committee have asked for.

On behalf of the committee, I extend a very warm welcome to Mr. Pat Gilmore, vice president of Education and Training Boards Ireland, ETBI; Mr. Tomás Mac Pháidín and Ms Mairéad Thompson from Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board; and Ms Anne McHugh, CEO of Donegal Education and Training Board. At this point I offer absolution to Ms McHugh as she may have to leave before our proceedings end in order to catch a train to Sligo. That is absolutely fine and understandable. I also welcome Ms Bríd Ní Dhonncha, príomhoide of Coláiste Ghobnait, Inis Oírr; Mr. Mícheál Ó Culáin, príomhoide of Coláiste Naomh Éinne, Inis Mór; Ms Mairéad Ní Fhátharta, príomhoide cúnta, Coláiste Naomh Eoin, Inis Meáin; Ms Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin, príomhfheidhmeannach, Gaelscoileanna Teo; Ms Anna Ní Chártúir, uachtarán, Gaeloideachais; Ms Deirdre O'Connor, assistant general secretary, and Ms Síne Friel from the INTO.

I invite delegates to make a brief opening statement of a maximum of five minutes duration. Where there is more than one delegate representing an organisation, as in the case of the INTO and Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, only five minutes are allowed, but the time may be shared. After the opening statements, we will have engagement with committee members. We shall hear from members first and then the other Oireachtas Members who have joined us. I thank them for doing so.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by me as Chairman to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I also advise that any opening statement made to the committee will be published on its website after the meeting.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I call on Mr. Gilmore to make the opening statement on behalf of ETBI.

**Mr. Pat Gilmore:** To correct the record, I am the former president of Education and Training Boards Ireland, ETBI. I am not currently the vice president, but I am representing ETBI today. I am delighted to be here to support island schools, Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and Donegal Education and Training Board.

The current 16 education and training boards, ETBs, were established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 and replaced the 33 vocational education committees, VECs, and the Irish Vocational Education Association, IVEA, which was the representative body of the VECs. They were reconfigured into ETBI which represents the 16 ETBs.

ETBI is a central resource for the ETB sector, for which it provides a range of support services. It is proud that approximately 40 of Ireland's 60 post-primary schools delivering education through the medium of Irish, *coláistí Gaeltachta* and *coláistí lán-Ghaeilge*, are within the ETB sector. Many of them are small schools, with only a handful having in excess of 500 pupils. These schools experience all of the challenges facing other small schools, but they also face additional challenges which are unique to the *lán-Ghaeilge* sector. To address these challenges, ETBI has applied to the Department of Education and Skills to sanction a *stiúrthóir* position to further develop the ETBs' 40 *coláistí Gaeltachta* agus *coláistí lán-Ghaeilge* which include the vast majority of Ireland's post-primary Gaeltacht schools. The establishment of the position would go a long way towards addressing the issues faced by small schools, particularly those in Gaeltacht areas and on the islands.

It is in this context that ETBI has long campaigned for appropriate resources for small schools and island schools which face the most challenges. A significant section of the ETBI congress in 2015 focused on island school-specific challenges. I recall that Deputy Jan O'Sullivan was then Minister for Education and Skills and attended our conference in Galway. She might recall my raising the issue with her at the time. I also recall an extraordinary contribution made by Ms Mairéad Ní Fhátharta who made a passionate speech in which she outlined the challenges facing island schools. She received a great reception from all of the delegates present.

After the 2015 congress, ETBI and the ETBs, with island schools, wrote to the Department on a number of occasions to seek engagement on the challenges identified by island schools. During the 2017 congress, as president of ETBI, I shared my frustration with the Minister and departmental officials. I recall a most passionate input by Comhairleoir Seán Ó Tuairisg at the conference. He is chairman of two of the schools on the Aran Islands. The Minister at that

time gave an undertaking that he would meet a delegation from the two ETBs most directly affected, namely Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and Donegal Education and Training Board. We look forward to receiving notice of that meeting from the Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Bruton.

It has come to our attention that extensive research from the United States and European countries makes a sound educational case for supporting small schools. The Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic governments also recognise that schools are the glue that binds communities together. Consequently, governments in those countries take their national responsibility very seriously, giving their full support to small schools, many of which are located in rural areas, including on offshore islands.

It is worth noting that in A Programme for a Partnership Government, there is a statement saying that under their watch, no small school will close. In that context also, it is important if they are not to close that they get adequate supports to stay open. In Ireland, we need to take heed of the importance that governments of other nations place on the benefits of small schools, not least in preventing rural decline and depopulation. Island schools face unique challenges. There are only five small second level schools located on offshore islands: Inis Mór, Inis Meáin, and Inis Oírr off Galway, and Arranmore and Tory Island off Donegal. The first three are managed by Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and the fourth and fifth by Donegal Education and Training Board.

It is interesting to note that my colleagues' coming here today from the island schools demonstrates the type of challenges they face. They had to leave yesterday to get here today and they will not get home until tomorrow. In many ways that reflects the type of challenges that they face on an ongoing and daily basis as people move from the mainland to the islands. As I have done at previous Education and Training Boards Ireland, ETBI, congresses, I will set out a few of these difficulties. They include the requirement for the Department of Education and Skills to create an island education policy for all of our islands and the sanctioning of a stiúrthóir at the ETBI to support the 40 schools referred to previously. I also refer to island specific adjustment to teaching allocation. The problem with teacher allocation is that dividing any small number by 20 ends up with very few and it is hard to get teachers to teach a range of subjects. Measures are also needed to assist island schools in accessing and retaining teaching staff. At our last Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board meeting, and I see the chief executive here, he spoke about the difficulty of providing home economics in his island schools, borrowing teachers from the mainland and sending them out. In fairness, when they do go out, they teach from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. to try to cover the course. Supports are also needed to encourage enrolment and scoláireachtaí to enhance the student numbers in these schools. Finally, I refer to the establishment of Coláiste Naomh Eoin on Inis Meáin, which is a kind of an attachment to Coláiste Cholmcille in Indreabhán, as an independent school.

Rather than waste time, I will finish by saying that the other 14 ETBs are totally behind Galway and Roscommon and Donegal ETBs in the challenges that they face and the opportunities that should be given to them to survive. They are very precious to the infrastructure, heritage and culture of the country. We do not want another Blasket Island situation to develop. One of our concerns is the decline in the population. In 1901, the population of island schools around Ireland was 4,500. It is now down to 1,950. There was a 6% decrease from 2011 to 2016 according to the Central Statistics Office figures. We acknowledge the challenges, we support our colleagues and we think that they deserve a better deal.

**Mr. Tomás Mac Pháidín:** Ba mhaith le Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus

Ros Comáin, GRETB, buíochas a ghlacadh leis an gComhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna as ucht cuireadh a thabhairt dúinn teacht os a chomhair chun dúshlán scoileanna ar oileáin a chíoradh. Is mise oifigeach oideachais agus stiúrthóir na scoileanna le GRETB. Tá ról agam mar chathaoirleach ar fhóram Gaeloideachais ETBI, fóram a thacaíonn le coláistí lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta san earnáil ETB. Tá Mairéad Thompson, atá mar cheanngnóthaí corparáideacha GRETB, ag tacú liom anseo inniu.

Bunaíodh GRETB sa bhliain 2013 mar chónascadh de thrí choiste gairmoideachais i gcathair na Gaillimhe, i gContae na Gaillimhe agus i gContae Ros Comáin. Tháinig an t-ionad oiliúna FÁS i Mervue na Gaillimhe faoi chúram GRETB sa bhliain 2014. Cuireann GRETB raon seirbhísí an-leathan ar fáil i gceantar an-fhairsing san iarthar. Freastalaímid ar dhaonra ilchineálach agus cuirimid seirbhísí ar fáil do dhaonra os cionn 342,000 i gcontaetha na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin. Áirítear oideachas dara leibhéal, breisoideachas agus oiliúint agus clár oideachais agus oiliúna phobalbunaithe i measc na seirbhísí sin. Feidhmíonn agus bainistíonn GRETB ionad oideachais sheachtraigh Cheapach na gCapall ar an bhFairche, ionad i bPríosún an Chaisleáin Riabhaigh agus ionad oideachais do dhéanaithe i mBealach an Doirín. Tá tuairim agus 6,500 scoláire dara leibhéal agus PLC againn agus tuairim agus 21,000 scoláire thar 40 ionad bhreisoideachais mar chuid den tsoláthar a dhéanann GRETB.

Tá GRETB i ndiaidh cumarsáid dhearfach leanúnach a dhéanamh leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, agus le Ranna eile, ag leagan amach go soiléir na dúshlán áirithe atá ag an líon an-mhór scoileanna beaga atá faoi phátrúnacht agus faoi bhainistíocht GRETB, i gcomparáid leis an 15 boird oideachais agus oiliúna eile. Go minic, bíonn scoil bheag amháin nó cúpla scoil bheag ag ETB, ach tá ocht scoil an-bheag ag GRETB, agus sé chinn acu le níos lú ná 100 scoláire. Go deimhin, tá ocht gcinn acu sin ag múineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge agus tá trí chinn acu suite ar oileáin amach ón gcósta. Sa bhliain 2013, bhunaigh GRETB dhá scoil nua, Coláiste Mhuirlinne agus Coláiste Bhaile Chláir, a bhfuil 1,500 scoláire eatarthu anois. Tháinig fás ar roinnt scoileanna eile de chuid an bhoird ag an am céanna. In ainneoin an méadú ar líon na scoileanna agus ar líon na scoláirí sna scoileanna sin, níor tháinig aon ardú ar bhuiséad ONP - gach rud seachas pá - de chuid GRETB ó 2012 go dtí 2016.

Tá sé leagtha amach inár gcur i láthair gur ardaigh líon na scoláirí ó 5,300 sa bhliain 2012 go dtí 6,500 sa bhliain 2016. Le haghaidh cuid mhaith den am idir 2012 agus 2016, bhí titim sa bhuiséad ag GRETB. Ba mhaith liom an tionchar a bhí aige sin ar fad a leagadh amach. Bhí laghdú ar líon na múinteoirí a bhí ceadaithe agus laghdú sa bhuiséad. Chuir sé sin ar fad brú ar GRETB maidir le tacú leis na scoileanna atá againn ar na hoileáin. Bhíomar faoi bhrú ós rud é go raibh a lán scoileanna beaga eile againn freisin. Rachfaidh mé tríd na deacrachtaí sonracha atá againn. Dar linn, is í an deacracht is mó ná nach bhfuil aon pholasaí maidir le oideachas ar na hoileáin ag an tír seo faoi láthair. Tá géarghá le polasaí cuimsitheach comhtháite maidir le soláthar, cothú agus daingniú fadtéarmach na seirbhísí oideachais ar oileáin scoite amach ón gcósta. Ba cheart go mbeadh polasaí ag an Roinn, ag na ETBs i nDún na nGall agus go deimhin i nGaillimh agus Ros Comáin, agus freisin ag ETBI. Teastaíonn polasaí náisiúnta chuige seo.

Mar a luaigh mo chomhghleacaí, an tUasal Gilmore, tá post ag leibhéal stiúrthóra á lorg do ETBI chun tacú leis an 40 scoil atá ag múineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge san earnáil ETB. Go deimhin, tá formhór na scoileanna Gaeltachta laistigh den ghrúpa sin. Níl ach cúpla scoil Gaeltachta ag an dara leibhéal nach bhfuil faoi scáth agus faoi bhainistíocht ETB. Tá deacrachtaí sonracha ag na scoileanna ar na hoileáin. Ní aithníonn an múnla náisiúnta leithroinnte múinteoirí riachtanais na scoileanna oileánda maidir leis an an gcóimheas múinteoirí is daltaí agus na leithdháiltí eile. Ní chabhraíonn an múnla náisiúnta sin linn tacú le scoileanna an-bheaga ar

na hoileáin mar nach bhfuil ach méid an-bheag scoláirí sna scoileanna sin. Tá dúshlán maidir leis an seachtain caighdeánach 28 uair a chlúdach sna scoileanna sin freisin. Tá deacrachtaí maidir le rochtain ar fhoireann chuí cáilithe, iad a earcú agus ansin iad a choinneál. Tá sé an-dúshlánach múinteoirí cuí cáilithe atá inniúil sa Ghaeilge a aimsiú chun teagasc ar na hoileáin. Ciallaíonn sé seo go minic go mbíonn athruithe go bliantúil ag foirne na scoileanna sin. Tá costais bhreise ar na múinteoirí atá ag obair ar oileáin mar bíonn lóistín ar an oileán agus, go minic, lóistín sa bhaile mhór i gceist, chomh maith le taisteal breise.

Maidir le cúrsaí buiséid, níl buiséad dóthanach ag na scoileanna ar oileáin. Ní aithnítear na costais breise atá ar na scoileanna oileánda maidir le leithdháileadh buiséid na scoileanna sin. Tá go leor costais sa bhreis ag scoileanna oileánda. Áirim cúrsaí taistil, costais laistis, costas breise deisiúcháin agus seirbhísí scoile. Tá costas ollmhór taistil ag baint le daltaí ag freastail ar imeachtaí ar an mór-thír - cluichí, taispeántais, comórtais agus imeachtaí scoile eile. Ní thugtar aon airgead breise do scoileanna ar oileáin mar, arís, níl aon pholasaí ar oideachas ar oileáin ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scoileanna chun dul i ngleic leis an gceist seo.

Idir 2008 agus 2017 rinne Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, GRETB, agus roimhe sin City of Galway Vocational Educational Committee, CGVEC, roinnt iarratas ar an Roinn chun maoiniú €103 per scoláire a fháil - the Irish and bilingual grant a dtugtar air. Bronntar é sin ar Ghaelcholáistí sna ceantair rachmasacha ach níl sé sin faighte ag aon scoil ETB in aon áit sa tír agus níl sé faighte ag aon cheann de na scoileanna ar na hoileáin. Ó thaobh GRETB de, is fiú thart ar €128,000 gach bliain an t-airgead sin nach bhfaigheann muid. Go deimhin, réiteodh sé cuid de na deacrachtaí atá ar an mbord againn inniu.

Maidir le rollú agus scoláireachtaí, ba mhaith linn go mbeadh ardú ar líon na scoláireachtaí atá ceadaithe ar na hoileáin. Faoi láthair tá 30 scoláireacht go náisiúnta do dhaoine a chaitheann bliain ar an oileán. Ba mhaith linn ardú ar sin. Ba mhaith linn freisin go mbeadh stádas neamhspleách ag Coláiste Naomh Eoin. Mar atá luaite ag mo chomhghleacaí, tá Coláiste Naomh Eoin, Inis Meáin, ceangailte le Coláiste Cholmcille ach is rud é a thugann dúshlán don dá scoil agus ní fheileann an socrú sin do cheachtar acu níos mó.

Sin iad mo chuid mórpointí. Glacaim buíochas leis an gcoiste as ucht éisteacht linn inniu.

**Ms Anne McHugh:** I thank the committee on behalf of Donegal Education and Training Board, ETB, for the opportunity to address the members about our schools, Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada ar Oileán Árann Mhór agus Coláiste Phobail Cholmcille ar Oileán Thoráí.

If one applies strict economic criteria, island schools do not provide value for money, but their value must not be underestimated. They are the lifeline of a dying breed, islanders, and as such the lifeline of an intrinsic part of our heritage, culture and individuality as Irish people and citizens. The Department has already acknowledged their importance, and it is through the Department's vision that these schools still exist, in the case of bunscoileanna, and have come into existence, in the case of meánscoileanna. Previously, whole generations of young people were denied their right to secondary education, and islands ran the risk of losing a whole generation of their people, many of whom never returned to live permanently on the islands. Many of these islands are the last outposts of the Irish language, and will play a vital role in the next few years while the Government tries to retain, preserve, strengthen and promote the Irish language before it dies out in Gaeltacht areas.

I will refer separately to our two schools. Despite being island schools, they both face different challenges. Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada officially opened with 28 students in October

1990. The school operated through the medium of English from the outset at the behest of parents, and it continued to do so until a High Court determination in 2008 resulted in the establishment of a sruth Gaeilge, which currently provides a full curriculum to 19 students trí mheán na Gaeilge. Current enrolment is 103. Some 59 of these students are attending as a result of inward migration to the island from the mainland. Additional teaching staff were appointed to facilitate the sruth Gaeilge, and it is the policy of Donegal ETB that each teacher appointed for Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada in the future will be fully capable of teaching their respective subjects through Irish. Teacher supply, and in particular supply of teachers with competence trí mheán na Gaeilge, is a national and a very worrying issue for our schools.

Implementing the High Court decision has imposed an additional strain on resources, in that the programmes offered through English have to be exactly replicated in the Irish stream. The school also faces the longer-term challenge of Gaeltacht education as per Circular Letter 0034/2017. This requires Gaeltacht schools within a five-year timeframe to implement an education service wholly and exclusively through the medium of Irish. This will be particularly difficult to implement, given the context of the High Court decision outlined above, which gives rights and entitlements to parents who want their children to be educated through both languages.

Our school in Árainn Mhór enjoys DEIS status, but the lack of school completion personnel attached to the programme places an onerous burden of management and co-ordination on the principal. The island is well-serviced by two ferry companies. However, obviously, there are days in the winter and particularly spring when access cannot be guaranteed, and services such as electricity, broadband, telephone and DEIS school lunches are regularly compromised by the location.

I refer now to Oileán Thoraí. In 1999, there were 28 pupils in the bunscoil, and the need for secondary education was critical. Coláiste Phobail Cholmcille had an initial enrolment of ten and now has an enrolment of six. Prior to the establishment of the school, the island's students were forced to relocate to the mainland and receive their second level education at Pobailscoil Chloich Cheann Fhaola. This proved to be a harrowing experience for many young islanders and their families, resulting in very poor completion rates. As a consequence, the vast majority of a cohort of islanders had not completed upper secondary education. It can be difficult to ensure that all subjects are taught by a subject expert, and substitute teachers are difficult to obtain. Staff end up covering and often teaching, as the supervision and substitution hours do not cover the amount of substitution needed. For example, if a teacher travels to the mainland with students, they may be away from school from 10.30 in the morning until 10.30 two days later, depending on ferries and whether the service is running. A language assistant and a grant for technology would really enable greater access, and they are urgently required.

The concept of the pupil-teacher ratio as applied to mainland schools was referred to, and a remote island school such as Tory Island does not compare favourably. The added benefits of DEIS status have not been afforded to Coláiste Phobail Cholmcille, despite the local bunscoil being designated as a DEIS school. This anomaly should be addressed immediately.

Coláiste Phobail Cholmcille is possibly the most remote school in the State. Teachers cannot commute to work. Often they are stuck on the island at weekends or are reluctant to go out to the mainland during term time because they may be stuck there, leaving colleagues to cover classes. The allowances to live and to travel on and off the island have been discontinued. However, the added expenses teachers have, such as rent on the island as well as their mortgage and rent on the mainland and travel expenses on and off the island still exist.

As students cannot easily travel to and from the mainland, the school cannot attract mainland students, and this restricts enrolment. Scholarships would help, but they are limited in number, and because of a stipulation which states that they may only be awarded to students outside the Gaeltacht, many of the students who would consider spending time on the island cannot apply, as they live within a local Gaeltacht area within the county.

However, I do wish to acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Skills for our schools. In particular, I refer to the principals for their outstanding work in this challenging area. I wish to extend an invitation to the members of the joint committee to visit both schools to see at first hand the excellent work that is being carried out to educate the students of both islands. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

**Chairman:** We have been shown a picture of a very difficult situation that faces the students, the teachers and the whole community. We will now have the opportunity to hear from three principals about what day-to-day life is like within the schools.

**Ms Bríd Ní Dhonncha:** Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghlacadh le baill an choiste as ucht cuireadh a thabhairt dom teacht os comhair an Chomhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna agus ár n-ímní maidir le leithdháileadh múinteora ar scoileanna oileáin a chur ina láthair. Is mise ainmní Chomhar na nOileán agus príomhoide i gColáiste Ghobnait, Inis Oírr. Ag cruinniú cinn bhliana de Chomhdháil Oileán na hÉireann a bhí ar siúl in Inis Bó Finne ar an 27 Aibreán i mbliana, tugadh aníos cás na n-oileán agus ritheadh rún go raibh áit rí-thábhachtach ag na scoileanna dara leibhéal i saol na n-oileán agus nach nglacfaí ar aon bhealach le haon neamhaird dá riachtanais shainiúla ná le beart ar bith a chuirfeadh inmharthanacht na scoileanna oileáin i mbaol sa todhchaí.

Tréaslaim leis an gcoiste as na forbairtí tábhachtacha atá déanta le blianta beaga anuas ar an soláthar oideachais iar-bhunscoile na hoileán. Tá achainí úr á cur agam faoi bhráid an choiste inniu, is é sin, go bhfuil na cúig scoil ag lorg ardaithe ar an leithroinnt ón 1.0 reatha go 2.5 coibhéis lánaimseartha, WTE, ex quota chun cur ar ár gcumas dul ar aghaidh le pleanáil agus freastal ar riachtanais na scoileanna oileáin. Tá scoileanna oileáin ag streachailt ó bhliain go bliain le go leor dúshlán maidir lena leithdháileadh múinteora. Tá scoileanna i gcoilár gach pobail, ach go mór mhór ar na hoileáin. Gan na scoileanna, bheadh na hoileáin i mbaol a mbánaithe. Is dúshlán mór atá ag scoileanna Gaeltachta ná timpeallacht a chothú inar féidir freastal ar riachtanais teanga agus oideachais dhaltaí an chórais sin, comhthreomhar lena chéile. Ní cheapaim gurb ionann dúshlán scoileanna na n-oileán agus dúshlán scoileanna beaga, cé go bhfuil cuid mhaith de na dúshlán chéanna i gceist maidir leis an leithdháileadh múinteora, agus ceapaim go gcaithfear dul i ngleic leis an leithdháileadh múinteora a bhaineann leis na hiar-bhunscoileanna oileáin. Faraor, ní aithnítear na dúshlán agus na constaicí atá roimh scoileanna oileáin maidir leis an leithdháileadh múinteora mar atá sé á fheidhmiú faoi láthair.

I gcás iar-bhunscoileanna oileáin, feictear go bhfuil ról lárnach ní hamháin ag comhthéacs na scoile, ach freisin ag comhthéacs an phobail i gcur chun cinn an oideachais. Áirítear comhdhéanamh éagsúil sóisialta, teanga agus cultúir i measc daltaí, agus go deimhin i measc múinteoirí iar-bhunscoileanna na Gaeltachta. Gné shuntasach, thábhachtach agus bunriachtanach atá de dhíth ná méadú ar an leithdháileadh múinteora le forbairt timpeallachtaí cuimsitheacha scoile a chruthú do dhaltaí Oileáin Árann. Mar shampla, faoi láthair, i gColáiste Ghobnait, tá bliain 1 agus bliain 2 le chéile do gach ábhar. Tá sé thar a bheith dúshlánach ag aon mhúinteoir pleanáil do seo.

Is í an príomhoide a bhíonn freagrach as roinnt an leithdháileadh múinteora. Bíonn ar an

bpríomhoide cinneadh a dhéanamh faoin mbealach is fearr chun blianta a chur le chéile, rud atá dodhéanta leis an leithdháileadh múinteora mar atá faoi láthair. Tá sé dodhéanta curaclam leathan a chur ar fáil do na daltaí leis an bhforáil atá dlite dóibh. Tá an leithdháileadh múinteora ina chnámh spairne lá i ndiaidh lae agus bliain i ndiaidh bliana sna scoileanna oileáin. Mar sin, teastaíonn ó gach scoil oileáin próiseas foghlama an dalta a dhaingniú agus a dhoimhniú, rud atá an-deacair a dhéanamh faoi láthair leis an leithdháileadh múinteora atá curtha ar fáil. Tá sé ríthábhachtach go ndéanfaí iarracht sainiú a dhéanamh ar riachtanais forbartha scoileanna oileáin tríd an leithdháileadh múinteora a ardú. Is é an dúshlán is mó a bhaineann leis an leithdháileadh múinteora mar atá sé nach n-aithníonn an múnla sainriachtanais agus saindúshlán scoileanna na n-oileán.

Tá sé ríthábhachtach mar sin go gcuirfí an leithdháileadh múinteora san áireamh agus cleachtais oiliúna á ndearadh agus á seachadadh ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna ionas go mbeidh ar chumas scoileanna oileáin a ndualgaís ghairmiúla a chomhlíonadh go héifeachtach d'fhonn eispéireas fiúntach foghlama agus forbartha a chinntiú do na daltaí atá faoina gcúram. Arís agus arís eile, táimid ag rá nach bhfeileann an leithdháileadh múinteora mar atá sé faoi láthair na scoileanna oileáin. Ní féidir na slata tomhais chéanna a úsáid i gcás oileáin de bharr uimhreacha ísle. Níor cheart go mbeadh leithdháileadh múinteora mar an gcéanna agus tomhaiste in aghaidh uimhreacha mar a bhíonn chuile áit eile sa tír.

Iarraim agus impím anois go ndéanfaí athbhreithniú, ar bhonn práinne, ar an leithdháileadh múinteora agus a chinntiú go mbíonn siad profa i bhfabhar scoileanna oileáin. Mar fhocail scoir, is é nádúr an chait ná luch a mharú. Is é nádúr scoileanna oileáin ná go mbeidh líon beag daltaí iontu i gcónaí, rud a chiallaíonn go bhfuil foirne teagaisc beaga iontu agus nach féidir curaclam oiriúnach, caighdeánach a chur ar fáil leis an leithdháileadh beag múinteoirí a chuireann an leithdháileadh, mar atá sé, ar fáil. Is ar mhaithe le forbairt agus oiliúint daltaí ár scoileanna oileáin atá an achainí úr seo. Tá sé fíorthábhachtach go mbeadh oideachas caighdeánach iarbhunscoile, atá dlite do scoláirí, á thairiscint do na scoláirí ar na hoileáin. De réir a chéile a thógtar na caisleáin, ach mura dtógfar na caisleáin ar na hoileáin go luath, ní bheidh aon scoil ná pobal ann.

Tá súil agam gur chuir mé fianaise bheacht agus shoiléir os comhair an choiste maidir leis an achainí seo atá ag scoileanna oileáin maidir leis an leithdháileadh múinteora. Impím ar an gcoiste a bhfuil ráite agam a chur san áireamh ina phlé mar Chomhchoiste Oideachais agus Scileanna agus mo mholadh maidir leis an ardú ar an leithdháileadh múinteora dár scoileanna oileáin a mholadh do na húdaráis chuí in aon tuairisc ag éirí as obair an lae inniu. Gabhaim buíochas leis na baill as éisteacht liom.

**Mr. Mícheál Ó Culáin:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach agus le comhaltaí an chomhchoiste. Tá mé i mo phríomhoide anois i gColáiste Naomh Éinne. Is 30 bliain é ó ch-uaigh mé go hÁrainn ar dtús. Shocraigh me síos ann, tá mé pósta agus táim i mo phríomhoide anois le ceithre bliana. Ritheann sé liom de réir mar atá an cruinniú seo ag dul ar aghaidh agus de réir mar atáimid ag déanamh aighneacht i ndiaidh aighneachta go bhfuil scéal an-dubh á phé-inteáil againn, go bhfuil muid ag taispeáint go bhfuil dúshlán againn agus go bhfuil muid ag súil go bhfaighimid éisteacht, ach is breá liom mo scoil. Is breá liom mo phost agus m'oileán. Is breá liom scoláirí a bheith ag teacht isteach chugam chuile lá agus muid ag triail cothrom na Féinne a thabhairt dóibh. Sin é an rud atá tábhachtach ar fad domsa - go bhfaigheann gasúir mo scoile cothrom na Féinne agus an rud atá dlite dóibh mar atá dlite d'aon scoláire eile ar fud na tíre.

Tá mise le labhairt leis an gcoiste inniu faoin mbrú atá orainn ó thaobh buiséid na scoile.

De bharr an múnla atá ann faoi láthair, bíonn go leor den airgead a fhaigheann muid faighte ar bonn *per capita*. Mar atá fhios ag na baill, cosnaíonn sé an méid céanna airgid seomra a théamh a bhfuil triúr istigh ann nó a bhfuil 30 istigh ann. Tá sé sin fíor faoi aon bhreosla agus aon rud atá tugtha isteach ar an oileán. Tá costas breise ag baint leis. Aon rud a cheannaíonn muid isteach ag an scoil, tá sé le cheannach againn ar nós aon scoil eile, ach nuair atá sé ceannaithe, tá costais breise lastais orainn. I gcuid cásanna faigheann muid deacrachtaí le comhlachtaí nár mhaith leo déileáil le scoileanna oileáin mar gheall ar chomh deacair agus atá sé stuif a fháil amach chomh fada linn.

Níl mé ag iarraidh dul rófhada ach ó thaobh chothabháil innealra, tá sé de dhualgas orainn cothabháil bhliantúil a dhéanamh ar innealra istigh i seomraí praiticiúla. Fuair muid praghas le gairid ó innealtóir taistil as Baile Átha Cliath, teacht chomh fada leis an oileán agus lá go leith oibre a dhéanamh istigh i seomra miotalóireachta. Sular chuireann an fear sin lámh ar inneal nó sular thógann sé aon rud amach as a bhosca uirlisí, tá suas le €800 caite againn. Ba é an praghas iomlán ná €1,885 le haghaidh dul agus cuí a chur ar innealra ar feadh lá go leith istigh i scoil oileáin toisc gur caithfeadh sé fanacht thar oíche. Tá difríocht mór ansin i gcomparáid le dá mbeadh air dul síos go Baile Átha an Rí, Baile Locha Riach nó aon áit eile sa tír.

Chomh maith leis sin, má thagann sé chomh fada leis an oileáin ní h'in é le rá gur féidir leis an oileán a fhágáil mar b'fhéidir go coinneodh ceo an t-eitleán ar an talamh. B'fhéidir go dtiocfadh gála agus nach mbeadh sé in ann imeacht ar feadh lá nó dhó. Bhí cás againn ansin anuraidh ina raibh pluiméir le teacht chomh fada le scoil in Inis Oírr. Bhí sé ina sheasamh ar an gcéibh i nDoolin agus bhí an taoide íseal. Fós bhí ar bhuiséad na scoile íoc as an bpluiméir ar feadh cúig uair a chloig agus gan é ach bheith ina sheasamh ar an gcéibh. Sin é an brú atá ar bhuiséid scoile atá againn. Sin é an rud nach dtuigeann daoine nuair atáimid ag caint ar bhuiséid scoile.

Murach an cúnamh a fhaigheann muid ó Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, GRETB, bheadh muid dúnta. Faigheann sé buiséad agus tá múnla aige le cúnamh a thabhairt dúinne mar scoileanna beaga. Dá mbeadh muid ag brath ar íocaíochtaí *per capita*, bheadh muid dúnta. Níl aon dabht faoi. Ní bheadh muid in ann maireachtáil.

Seo é an ceathrú uair atá cás nó aighneacht déanta againn ag leibhéal rialtais le bliain anuas. Is é seo an tríú uair domsa dul os comhair comhchoiste. Bhí mé ag an gComhchoiste um Ealaíona, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta agus ag an gComhchoiste Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus na nOileán. Seo é an tríú cheann dom. Ag an am seo, tá mé ag súil go bhfaighfidh éisteacht. Tá mé ag súil nach bhfágfar na scoileanna beaga oileáin ar deireadh. Tá sé seo ráite agam go minic. Tá daonra na n-oileán ag crosbhóthar. Mura ndéanfar rud éicint agus muna mbeadh fis ag duine éicint, beidh muid fágtha ar lár agus gheobhaidh muid bás.

Ba mhaith liom íomhá a chur i gcloigne na baill. Iarraim orthu smaoiniamh ar chrann álainn istigh i ngáirdín, agus géaga beaga álainne, duilliúr agus bláthanna air. Is iad na píosaí is faide amach den chrann - na píosaí is imeallaí - a gheobhaidh bás sa chéad áit. Gheobhaidh na duilleoga bás agus gheobhaidh na bláthanna bás, ach ní mórán cuma atá ar an gcrann gan na duilleoga agus na bláthanna. Is muide na duilleoga agus na bláthanna atá ag an tír seo chomh fada agus a bhaineann sé liomsa. Tá na hoileáin órga, maorga don tír má fhaigheann siad an t-aitheantas. Tá sé tábhachtach go dtabharfar an t-aitheantas sin do phobail na n-oileán. Ba cheart go bhfaighfidh céard atá dlite dúinn agus tacaíocht ón tír seo. Tá sé tábhachtach go mbreathnaítear orainn agus go ndéileáiltear linn i gceart.

**Chairman:** I ask Ms Mairéad Ní Fhátharta, who is the príomhoide cúnta in Coláiste Naomh

Eoin in Inis Meáin, to address the committee.

**Ms Mairéad Ní Fhátharta:** Tá mé buíoch as an gcuireadh bheith i gcuideachta an choiste inniu. Gabhaim buíochas leis an gcoiste as an éisteacht seo a thabhairt dom. Tá mé mar phríomhoide cúnta ar Choláiste Naomh Eoin ar Inis Meáin. Is faoi bhainistíocht agus uimhir rolla Choláiste Cholmcille in Indreabhán a fheidhmíonn Coláiste Naomh Eoin. Is oileánach de bhunadh Inis Meáin ó dhúchas mé. Tá mé ag múineadh i gColáiste Naomh Eoin le deich mbliana. Roimhe sin, chaith mé ceithre bliana i gColáiste Naomh Éinne ar Inis Mór. Is féidir a rá go bhfuil mo shaol múinteoireachta go dtí seo caite agam i scoileanna oileáin. Ó mo chúlra féin mar scoláire, mar dhuine a fhás suas ar oileán agus anois mar mhúinteoir, ceapaim go bhfuil tuiscint chuimsitheach agam ar a bhfuil i gceist le hoideachas a chur ar fáil i scoil oileáin. Is léir dom ó mo thaithí nach n-oireann an foirmle soláthair a úsáidtear go náisiúnta don chomhthéacs scoil oileáin. Neartóidh mé an tuairim seo tuilleadh le linn mo chur i láthair.

Tá iarratas curtha isteach ag Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin chuig an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna ó mhí an Mheithimh 2017 ar stádas neamhspléach a lorg do Choláiste Naomh Eoin. Tá an scoil ag feidhmiú gan stádas neamhspléach ó 2002. As an gcúig mhéanscoil ar na hoileáin scoite amach, tá Coláiste Naomh Eoin ar Inis Meáin ar an tríú scoil oileáin is mó sa tír anois le 41 dalta. Tá duaiseanna mór le rá bainte amach ag an scoil i gcomórtais náisiúnta agus sinn in iomaíocht le sár-scoileanna na tíre i gcomórtais ar nós Junk Kouture, BT Young Scientist, Eco-Unesco agus Scléip. Níos suimiúla, tá ceithre sparántacht Stáit, ar fiú €16,000 an ceann, bronnta ar scoláirí Choláiste Naomh Eoin as sár-thorthaí a bhaint amach i scrúdú na hardteistiméireachta le trí bliana as a chéile. Fuair na scoláirí na torthaí is fearr inár réigiún DEIS, cé nach bhfuil stádas DEIS ag aon scoil oileáin. Níl stádas DEIS ag Coláiste Naomh Eoin, ach mar gheall go bhfuil siad ar an rolla i gColáiste Cholmcille, ní dhéantar aon idirdhealú eatarthu.

Ní oireann an struchtúr bainistíochta mar atá sé faoi láthair do Choláiste Naomh Eoin. Is fúmsa amháin atá riaradh na scoile. Níl sé sin sláintiúil. Tá impleachtaí móra ó thaobh sláinte agus sábháilteachta ag baint leis an socrú sealadach seo, atá i bhfeidhm le 15 bliana anois. Dar liom, is gá aitheantas mar scoil neamhspléach a bhronnadh ar Choláiste Naomh Eoin, ní amach anseo ach láithreach. Leagfaidh mé amach na cúiseanna leis seo. Tá dúshlán ar leith ag an scoil seo. Tá easpa uimhir rolla orainn. Cé go roinneann muid an uimhir rolla le Coláiste Cholmcille in Indreabhán, níl aon idirdhealú idir an dá scoil, gníomh a dhéanann riaradh agus feidhmiú laethúil na scoile fíordheacair agus anróiteach. Ní oireann an coincheap reatha sin cianbhainistiú ar chor ar bith. Tá na mílte farraige idir an dá scoil.

Tá na deacrachtaí ag meadú le fás agus forbairt na scoile. Mar shampla, faoin post-primary online database, is i gColáiste Cholmcille in Indreabhán amháin atá na scoláirí cláraithe. Cothaíonn sé seo sárú ar pholasaí maidir le tuairisciú tinrimh agus araile. Ní bhíonn Coláiste Naomh Eoin san áireamh do dheontais ná maoiniú Stáit a bhronntar ar scoileanna mar nach bhfuil uimhir rolla ag an scoil. Níl aon ionadaí ar chomhairle na scoláirí ag Coláiste Naomh Eoin ná ar bhord bainistíochta na scoile mar nach féidir freastal ar chruinnithe de bharr cúinsí tíreolaíochta, in ainneoin gur riachtanas é seo faoin Acht Oideachais 1998. Le himeacht ama, tá an caidreamh oibre idir an dá scoil ag laghdú mar go mbíonn ar Choláiste Naomh Eoin gníomhú as a stuaim féin, cé nach bhfuil na hacmhainní againn chun an obair seo a láimhseáil. Go minic, bíonn orainn gníomhú go teoiriciúil faoi pholasaí scoil DEIS ar an mórthír.

Tá dúshlán churaclaim againn freisin. Is deacair curaclam leathan a sholathár de bharr easpa múinteoireachta réasúnach uaireanta. Tá oiread sin agus breis d'fhadhb againn mar go mbraitheann Coláiste Naomh Eoin ar dheonú churaclaim gach bliain chun uaireanta múin-

teoireachta a fháil. Mar sin, ní féidir pleanáil chuí a dhéanamh agus bíonn sé ina mhí Lúnasa faoin am a bhfaighimse an dáileadh múinteora, agus sin tar éis an samhradh a chaitheamh ag troid ar a shon. Nuair a thagann na huaireanta sa deireadh thiar thall, bíonn go leor ar lár. Mar shampla, ní fhaigheann muid an 0.5 d'abhantracht chomhoideachais ná an 0.25 do phríomhoide tánaisteach. Ionadh na n-ionadh, ní fhaigheann muid an múinteoir iomlán lánaimseartha a thugtar do scoileanna beaga, cé gur scoil beag í Coláiste Naomh Eoin. Dála an scéil, ní fhaigheann Coláiste Ghobnait ar Inis Oírr an allúntas sin ach oiread.

Maidir le pleanáil forbartha scoile, níl polasaí ná pleanáil Choláiste Cholmcille feiliúnach ar chor ar bith do Choláiste Naomh Eoin. Is scoil oileáin i gcoinne scoil DEIS atá i gceist. Níl an córas bainistíochta VSwire in ann aon idirdhealú a dhéanamh idir scoláirí an dá scoil. Is i gColáiste Naomh Eoin a bhíonn na rollaí a bhaineann leis an scoil sin agus bíonn siad déanta ar an seanchóras le lámh. Déanann an easpa aitheantais seo obair Choimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit an-chasta mar nach mbíonn Coláiste Naomh Eoin san áireamh tráth a mbíonn scrúdaitheoirí á gceapadh. Is ar iarratas breise, ag uair na cinniúna i gcónaí, a dhéantar solathár do Choláiste Naomh Eoin. Ceapann na feitheoirí go bhfuil siad le bheith i gColáiste Cholmcille in Indreabhán, ach nuair a chuireann siad glaoch ar an scoil agus faigheann siad amach go caithfidh siad dul amach ar oileán ar feadh seachtain nó coicís, ní ghlacann siad leis an bpost agus caithfear feitheoirí eile a chuartú. Tá an socrú seo baolach freisin ó thaobh seachadadh scrúduithe idir an dá scoil. Uaireanta is go leictreonach, nó ar an eitleán, a chaithfear páipéir a sholáthar. Tá a fhios againn an baol a bhaineann leis na gníomhaíochtaí sin. Bíonn deacracht ó thaobh síniú oifigiúil, mar shampla, seiceanna scoile a sheoladh isteach agus amach chun síniú a fháil, más féidir. Tá impleachtaí slándála agus riosca ag baint le seiceanna réamhshínithe a bheith fágtha thart.

Is fionscoil í Coláiste Naomh Eoin, ach titeann sí idir dhá stól. Tá sí ann agus ag feidhmiú, ach níl sí ann go hoifigiúil. Níl sé seo sásúil ar bhealach ar bith. Ba mhaith liom go mbeadh a fhios ag an gcoiste gur scoil den chéad scoth í Coláiste Naomh Eoin, a bhfuil sár-chaighdeán bainte amach aici in ainneoin easpa aitheantais agus struchtúr bainistíochta atá oiriúnach. Tar éis 15 bliana - tá mé cinnte go n-aontóidh an choiste gur achar sách fada é sin le bheith mar thréimhse príomha ag aon scoil - ní féidir neamhaird a dhéanamh níos mó de riachtanais na scoile seo. Creidim go léiríonn mo chur i láthair an phráinn a bhaineann leis go mbronnfaí stádas neamhspléach ar Choláiste Naomh Eoin láithreach. Is seoid teanga, seoid chultúir agus seoid oideachais chomhaimseartha í an scoil seo, ní hamháin d'Inis Meáin ach don tír ar fad. Tuigim go bhfuil athbreithniú ar an gcóras bainistíochta scoileanna dara leibhéal idir lámha ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna faoi láthair. Iarraim go ndéanfaí foráil ar leith do shainriachtanais scoileanna oileáin sa pholasaí seo nuair a chomhaontaítear é.

Glacaim buíochas arís leis an gcoiste as an deis a thabhairt dom an phráinn a bhaineann leis an iarratas seo a roinnt. Is fiú a mheabhrú nár oscail an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna aon scoil dara leibhéal ar na hoileáin sa chéad seo. Tá súil agam, agus muid ag teannadh le 2018, go mbeidh sé sin curtha ina cheart agus go mbeidh stádas neamhspléach bronnata ar Choláiste Naomh Eoin. Tá mé buíoch as an éisteacht. Beidh mé ag tnúth go mór le dea-thoradh ar obair an choiste.

**Chairman:** Go raibh maith agat, a Mhairéad. I now invite Ms Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin of Gaelscoileanna Teoranta to address the joint committee.

**Ms Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin:** Thar ceann Ghaeloideachas Teoranta, gabhaim buíochas leis an gcoiste as an deis a thabhart dúinn teacht anseo agus labhairt faoi ábhar atá thar a bheith tábhachtach agus atá ag cruthú, mar atá soiléir, go leor deacrachtaí agus go leor dúshlán. É sin

ráite, is ábhar dóchais é dúinn agus do na scoileanna go bhfuil aird an choiste agus a aitheantas ar an gceist seo agus gabhaimid buíochas leis an gcoiste as sin.

Tá an eagraíocht Gaeloideachas Teoranta ar an bhfód ó 1973. Gaelscoileanna Teoranta an t-ainm a bhí air ag an am. Le trí bliain anuas tá cúram na scoileanna Gaeltachta orainn mar eagraíocht agus muid ag plé sa réimse tumoideachas, Gaeloideachas agus réamhscoileanna, nó luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge. Chuireamar aighneacht faoi bhráid an choiste agus is dóigh liom go bhfuil an chuid is mó de na pointí sin clúdaithe agus déanta go han-snasta ag mo chairde anseo. Mar sin, tá mé chun é a fhágáil faoi Anna Ní Chartúir, atá mar uachtarán ar an eagraíocht anois, labhairt níos mó faoi thionchar na ndúshlán seo ar na pobail agus ar an oideachas lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta.

**Ms Anna Ní Chartúir:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gcoiste as ucht an deis a thabhairt do Ghaeloideachas Teoranta labhairt ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo inniu. Mar a dúirt Iníon Ní Ghréacháin ansin, tá go leor de na ceisteanna a bhí ardaithe againn féin leis an gcoiste agus go leor de na dúshlán clúdaithe ar bhealach amháin nó ar bhealach eile go dtí seo, agus tacaíonn muid go hiomlán leis na moltaí agus leis na pointí atá déanta.

Maidir le mo chúlra féin, bhí mé mar phríomhoide ar scoil bheag go dtí an bhliain seo caite. Nuair a chloisim “scoil bheag”, béicim i gcónaí mar tá aird ar leith agus spéis ar leith agam ann. Ar fhaitíos na míthuisceana, ní chiallaíonn “scoil bheag” go bhfuil níos lú oibre ar bun. Ní chiallaíonn “scoil bheag” go bhfuil níos lú cáipéisí nó tuairiscí le scríobh nó nach bhfuil scrúduithe le réiteach chuile bhliain, bliain i ndiaidh bliana. An rud a chiallaíonn sé i ndáiríre ná go bhfuil níos lú foirne ann leis an obair sin a dhéanamh. Sílim nach dtuigeann daoine é sin, b’fhéidir amanna, nuair a bhíonn siad ag caint ar na scoileanna beaga. Mar a chur mo chuid chomhghleacaithe i láthair anseo roimhe seo, tá an obair chéanna ag dul ar aghaidh, lá go lá, le níos lú foirne agus níos lú buiséad.

Má thógann muid ar ais é go dtí céard is scoil ann, pointe a d’ardaigh duine éigin níos luaithe, is í an scoil croílár an phobail. Is í an scoil a choinníonn beocht in aon phobal beag agus in aon phobal oileáin. Bíonn muid ag súil go gcuirfear oideachas, sa gciall is leithne, ar fáil sa scoil sin. Le hé sin a dhéanamh, táimid ag iarraidh go mbeadh rogha ábhar agus rogha deiseanna ar fáil agus go mbeidh an t-oideachas sin ar fáil do chuile dhuine atá sa scoil sin ag leibhéal atá oiriúnach dóibh féin. Níl sé oiriúnach go mbeadh trí rang - an chéad bhliain, an dara bliain ná an tríú bliain - faoi chúram mhúinteoir amháin i gcuid de na hábhair. Ní shin oideachas atá oiriúnach. Ní shin oideachas gur chóir dúinn a bheith sásta glacadh leis.

Dar ndóigh, ar na hoileáin chomh maith, caithfidh muid a smaoineamh ar céard faoi atá sé seo. Tá an cheist seo uilig faoi ghasúir. Céard atáimid ag iarraidh dár gcuid gasúr sa gcóras oideachais? Táimid ag iarraidh go dtiocfaidh forbairt orthu agus go ndéanfaidh siad fás pearsanta agus go bhforbróidh siad tuiscintí orthu féin mar ghasúir, mar chuid dá bpobal, mar chuid dá gcultúr agus mar chuid dá n-oidhreacht agus go mbeidh na múinteoirí in ann scoileanna agus straitéisí a mhúineadh dóibh agus go réiteoidh muid iad don oideachas fadshaoil. Sin atá i gceist againn ar fad mar mhúinteoirí istigh inár gcuid scoileanna. Táimid ag iarraidh na tacaíochtaí is oiriúnaí dúinne mar mhúinteoirí leis an obair sin a dhéanamh.

Sna 1980í, d’fhreastail mé ar mheánscoil chónaithe i dTuar Mhic Éadaigh i gContae Mhaigh Eo. Is maith is cuimhin liom é mar bhí go leor oileánaigh in éineacht liom sa scoil sin - oileánaigh ó Inis Mór, ó Inis Oírr agus ó Inis Meáin. Bhí sé suntasach mar ní dheachaigh na hoileánaigh sin abhaile ach b’fhéidir faoi thrí nó faoi cheathair sa mbliain. Chuaigh siad abhaile faoi Shamhain, faoi Nollaig, faoi Cháisc agus sa samhradh. Ar bhealach, is daoine an-uaigneach a

bhí iontu. Bhíodh uaigneas orthu i ndiaidh a muintir agus i ndiaidh a gcairde agus sin ag am an-tábhachtach i saol duine ar bith agus iad ina ndéagóirí ag fás aníos. Níor mhaith liomsa a cheapadh go dtiocfadh an lá sin arís go mbeadh ar oileánaigh a gcuid bailte agus a gcuid pobail a fhágáil le hoideachas a fháil i scoileanna cónaithe. Tá amhras agus faitíos orm gurb in an treo go bhfuilimid ag dul muna gcuirtear rudaí ina bhfeabhas. Má shéanann muid deiseanna ar ghasúir na n-oileán, táimid ag séanadh deiseanna orthu freastal ar imeachtaí náisiúnta, féilte, díospóireachtaí agus rudaí eile mar gheall, mar a cuireadh síos go dtí seo, ar an gcostas breise a bhaineann leis sin.

Ba mhaith liom tagairt a dhéanamh don pholasaí ar luadh go dtí seo. Tá géarghá le polasaí Stáit a leagan amach céard iad na príoreachtaí atá ann do na hoileáin. Ní hionann scoileanna ar oileán agus scoileanna ar mhórthír. Tá éiginnteacht ag baint leis an todhchaí sna scoileanna seo. Tá eolas míchruinn agus doiléiré ann. Cén fáth a bhfuil stádas DEIS ag roinnt bunscoileanna oileánda agus nach bhfuil ag na meánscoileanna? Ní luíonn sé le réasún agus níl aon chiall leis. Ba mhaith linn freagraí a fháil go luath. Cén fáth go bhfaigheadh bunscoil stádas DEIS agus nach bhfaigheadh meánscoil atá cúpla céad slat síos an bóthar é? Ba mhaith linn soiléiriú a fháil ar an bpróiseas a bhaineann leis seo. Síleann muid gurb shin cur chuige a bheadh trédhearchacht agus oscailte.

Má bhreathnaíonn muid ar na hoileáin ar fud fad na tíre agus ceist á chur orainn féin cén fáth a bhfuil scoileanna fós ar na hoileáin seo, is é an fáth ná mar gheall go bhfuil príomhoidí ann cosúil le Bríd Ní Dhonncha, Mairéad Thompson agus Mícheál Ó Culáin a rinne cur síos ansin ar an saol ar na hoileáin. Mar sin féin, sílim gur fhág siad ar lár an obair bhreise a dhéanann siad féin mar phríomhoidí agus an dua breise a chuireann siad orthu féin ó lá go lá, má tá fuinneog briste nó leithreas briste. Má tá múinteoir tinn, is cinnte gur istigh sa rang atá na príomhoidí sin ag líonadh isteach agus ag déanamh na hoibre sin. Níl na hionadaithe ann agus ní bheidh na hionadaithe ann go mbeidh polasaí ceart Stáit ann. Is mar gheall go bhfuil na múinteoirí sna scoileanna sin sásta dualgaí agus obair breise a dhéanamh go bhfuil na scoileanna sin fós ann, ach tá a a bhfoighid ag cliseadh. Tádar ag fáil mífhoighdeach agus tuigeann muid é sin go maith dóibh.

Iarraim go n-iarrfadh muid stádas DEIS do na scoileanna oileánda sin ar fad. Is cúiteamh a bheadh ann do na míbhuntáistí sonracha atá acu sna scoileanna sin. Iarrann muid go bhfaigheadh siad ar fad stádas “scoil bheag”. Ní dhéanann sé ciall ar bith go bhfaigheadh iarbunscoil amháin stádas scoil bheag agus nach bhfaigheadh scoil b’fhéidir níos lú ar an gcéad oileán eile an stádas ceannann céanna. Iarrann muid go gcuirfí ar ais an liúntas a bhí ar fáil do mhúinteoirí a bhíodh ag múineadh ar na scoileanna oileánda roimh 2011. Is liúntas a bhí anseo a thug cúiteamh dóibh, ar bhealach, ar an obair bhreise, ar an síorchuartú ar théacsleabhair agus ar áiseanna ar comhchaighdeán leis na cinn atá ar fáil i mBéarla. Iarrann muid freisin go mbeadh soiléiriú ar na ceisteanna atá na scoileanna seo agus na haonaid a bhaineann leo ag cur le blianta fada anuas. Thabharfadh sé seo stádas seasmhach do na scoileanna agus thabharfadh sé cinnteacht do na príomhoidí atá ag iarraidh pleanáil don todhchaí. Thabharfadh sé deis dóibh cláir ama a leagan amach ó thús na bliana go deireadh na bliana a bheadh feiliúnach dá scoileanna féin. Bheadh cinnteacht fostaíochta ó thaobh na múinteoirí de. Ag deireadh an lae, ní bheadh ann ach cothrom na Féinne do na gasúir agus don phobal.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Ní Ghréacháin agus Ms Ní Chartúir. Our final contribution is from the INTO. I call Ms Deirdre O’Connor, who is assistant general secretary of the INTO.

**Ms Deirdre O’Connor:** The INTO welcomes this opportunity to address the joint committee on the challenges facing island schools. We will focus on the primary schools on the is-

lands. I am here with my colleague, Ms Síne Friel, who put together our submission, which has been circulated. In 2018, we will celebrate 150 years of representing teachers in Ireland. We represent the teachers in the 12 offshore primary schools in the Republic. As a trade union, the INTO's primary interest is in representing the interests of the teachers, but we have a long history of seeking to support and develop the schools and communities in which they work. The INTO strongly argues that the local school has a key role in sustaining vibrant and viable local communities. Nowhere is this more important than on our islands. Island populations deserve high-quality and fully resourced primary education in their communities.

Our submission sets out the context of primary education in the 12 primary schools on the offshore islands. The numbers used are those for the 2016-2017 school year. The number of pupils varies from three on Inishturk, which is the smallest school, to 42 in Scoil Rónáin on Inis Mór, Árann. Last year, nine of the schools had two classroom teachers and the other three had one. Each school has an additional part-time teaching allocation to provide for special educational needs. Eight are Gaeltacht schools and another eight are designated disadvantaged and are covered by the rural strand of DEIS.

In common with other small schools, island schools face particular challenges in their staffing allocation. A budget decision in 2012 increased the appointment and retention figures for small schools. The number of pupils required to appoint a second teacher was increased from 12 to 20 in the period between 2012 and 2015. The number of pupils required to appoint a third teacher increased from 49 to 56 over the same period. We acknowledge that these numbers were reduced by one for 2016 and 2017, and that the figures for retention were also reduced. However, the INTO believes that the appointment and retention figures for all small schools should be restored to pre-2012 levels.

In addition, a specific staffing provision for island schools introduced in last year's budget means that where a school is the only school on an island, it can appoint a second teacher, regardless of numbers. The measure has resulted in additional appointments to two schools on Tory and Inishturk. This is very welcome. Teaching in a one-teacher school can leave teachers professionally and socially isolated, especially in a setting where the nearest school is on the mainland. All of the island schools have multi-class teaching. In other words, children of different ages are taught different programmes in the same classroom. Smaller class sizes are warranted in small schools to provide for this. In the largest island school, there are multi-classes of more than 20 pupils.

Accessing and retaining teaching staff remains a key challenge for island schools. The challenges of living on an island or commuting to work there are well documented, and have been covered by our colleagues here. Prior to 2012, this was recognised by the Department and an additional allowance was paid to teachers in island schools. However, this allowance was abolished for new beneficiaries from 1 February 2012. This allowance provided some compensation for the increased costs involved in teaching on an island, and the INTO calls for it to be restored. Recruiting substitute teachers is currently a challenge in all schools, but that challenge is increased in island schools, leading to a situation where absences are frequently not covered. This matter could be addressed for all schools, but particularly for the island schools, by setting up supply panels to cover all schools.

All of the island schools are led by teaching principals who have to teach their multi-class group and carry out the administrative and management tasks required of a primary school. As my colleague, Ms Ní Chártúir, has pointed out, the fact that the school is small does not mean there is any less work to be done in that regard. Currently, there are 15 release days available

for principals of island schools with one teacher or two teachers, well short of the day per week which INTO believes is necessary to run a primary school. Of course, this is also dependent on being able to get a substitute to come out and cover for those days.

Principal teachers in primary schools are also still awaiting the outstanding pay award made to them in 2008, which remains unpaid. Enrolment and maintaining pupil numbers remain key challenges for all island schools. The enrolment numbers in island primary schools fluctuate with the population, but island schools are more vulnerable than others as they cannot easily attract enrolment from a wider area as other schools do. However, it is positive to see that seven of the island schools have had an increase in enrolments over the period since 2011. Given the natural fluctuations in population and the contribution that primary schools make to the vitality of an island community, it is important that a long-term view is taken when deciding the viability of an island school. Enrolment in a given year is not necessarily indicative of the future enrolment potential of that school, and consideration must be given to the broader picture and the community's needs.

Is scoileanna Gaeltachta iad formhór de na scoileanna ar na hoileáin. Tá sé an-tábhachtach go dtabharfaí gach tacaíocht do na scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht plé leis an gcomhthéacs casta teanga ina bhfuil siad ag feidhmiú. Tá cúram ar leith ar na scoileanna atá lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht de réir An Achta Oideachais 1998 cuidiú chun an Ghaeilge a choinneáil mar phríomhtheanga an phobail. Aithníonn Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 gurb iad na scoileanna atá mar chroíchuid den tacaíocht atá de dhíth chun cur le húsáid na Gaeilge i measc an phobail Ghaeltachta. Tá cúram ar an Roinn Oideachais a chinntiú go bhfeidhmíonn an córas oideachais ar mhaithe leis an nGaeilge agus le pobal na Gaeltachta. Ní mór gach tacaíocht a chur ar fáil do na scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht chun a chur ar a gcumas ardchaighdeán oideachais a sholáthar don phobal. Aithnímid go bhfuil an polasaí aitheanta do scoileanna Gaeltachta ar bun agus gur chuir 78% de na scoileanna atá lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht isteach ar sin. Beidh tacaíocht de dhíth ar na scoileanna seo chun forbairt agus fás a chur leis an nGaeilge sna háiteanna sin.

In this opening statement I have not touched on other challenges we have identified in our submission, including funding challenges outlined by colleagues and the issue of the operation of the rural DEIS scheme in primary schools, but we are happy to address these issues in the discussion. Gabhaim buíochas le baill an choiste as éisteacht, agus tá muid ag súil leis na nithe seo a phlé leis an gcoiste.

**Chairman:** We have now had all of the opening statements. I thank our witnesses. I was a little bit more lenient with the time than I would normally be, bearing in mind the huge journeys that you have all had to make.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** I dtosach báire ba mhaith liom míle buíochas a ghlacadh leis an gcoiste as ucht an deis a thabhairt dúinn an cheist sin a phlé. Bhí na cuir i láthair cumasach amach agus amach. Thóg na finnétithe na gnéithe éagsúla den cheist seo agus chuir siad iad i láthair go an-soiléir. Tá an cas curtha ar bhealach thar barr ar fad. Léiríonn sé an éagothroime atá ann agus an leatrom atá á dhéanamh ar na gasúir, ar na múinteoirí agus ar na pobail oileánda mar gheall ar an bhfolús polasaithe ó thaobh na Roinne. Thóg mé ar bord an méid a dúirt cuid de na finnétithe, is é sin gurb é sin an ceathrú babhta ós comhair comhchoiste ag cuid acu. Sílim go bhfuil tábhacht ar leith ag baint leis seo toisc gur comhchoiste um oideachas atá ann agus go bhfuil muid freagrach don Aire Oideachais agus Scoileanna, nó go bhfuil sé freagrach dúinne, agus go mbeidh muid in ann na ceisteanna seo a bhrú go láidir.

Bheadh sé iontach spéisiúil dá dtabharfadh na triúr príomhoide miniú dúinn ar cén chaoi

ar éirigh leo clúdach a fháil dóibh féin le bheith in ann teacht amach anseo inniu. Thaistil siad inné, tá siad imithe inniu agus beidh cuid mhaith den lá ámarach caite sula mbeidh siad sa bhaile. I gcomhthéacs an leithroinnt múinteoirí agus gach a bhfuil ann, ceapaim gur scéal ann féin é sin.

Má bhreathnaímid ar an mórpicéir agus má seasaimid siar uaidh seo, tá muid ag cloisteáil ó scoileanna móra ar fud na tíre go bhfuil deacrachtaí acu ó thaobh múinteoirí a fháil, go háirithe daoine atá inniúil teagasc in ábhair éagsúla agus araile. Tá sé sin ag chuile scoil sa tír. Táimid ag cloisteáil é sin. Sa mhullach ar sin, is ó scoileanna beaga na finnétithe. Sa mhullach ar sin, tá na scoileanna ar oiléain. Sa mhullach ar sin, tá na scoileanna faoi mhíbhuntáiste agus tá formhór acu ina scoileanna Gaeltachta. Tá leibhéil éagsúla dúshláin ann. Ón taithí atá agam féin freastal agus cuairt a thabhairt ar na scoileanna ar na hoileáin, tá an rud atá na finnétithe ag rá ó thaobh an sonas a bhíonn le haireachtáil nuair a théitear isteach sna scoileanna fíor. Tá an spiorad sna scoileanna ar na hoileáin dochreidte i ndairíre. Is eiseamláir amach agus amach é do scoileanna ar fud na tíre. Is mór an teistiméireacht do na finnétithe é chuile duine de na geallsealbhóirí éagsúla sa réimse go bhfuil sé sin amhlaidh. Caithfear é a chaomhnú, é a neartú agus cur leis.

Sílim go dtagann sé seo síos do dhá bhuncheist. Is é an rud a luaigh na finnétithe arís agus arís eile ná cothrom na Féinne, ní hamháin do na daltaí ach do na tuismitheoirí, múinteoirí, boird bainistíochta agus eile. Is é an rud eile ná polasaí. Caithfear polasaí cuimsitheach a bheith ann. Is cás faoi leith é. Ní fhéadfá a rá dá leagfar síos slat tomhais go mbeadh chuile scoil ar fud na tíre ag argóint go bhfuil siadsan ag iarraidh na rudaí céanna mar níl ann ach líon beag scoileanna den chineál seo agus níl ann ach líon teoranta dalta ag freastal orthu agus mar sin de.

Fáiltím roimh an deis atá againn an tuairisc speisialta a dhéanamh. Sílim gur léiriú ar an spéis atá sa gceist seo go bhfreastal baill ar an gcomhchoiste in ainneoin nach bhfuil an Dáil ná an Seanad ina suí inniu. B'fhéidir go luafaidh mé cúpla rud a chuirfeadh leis an tuairisc atáimid ag cur i dtoll a chéile. An féidir leis na bhfinnéithe breis a rá faoi na scoláireachtaí agus faoin úsáid atá bainte as scoláireachtaí sna scoileanna atá ag na finnétithe ó thaobh daltaí a mhealladh chuig na scoileanna agus an cuidiú a thugann sin ó thaobh leithroinnte? Ó thaobh sholáthar múinteoirí agus an clúdach a bhíonn á lorg, mar shampla má bhíonn múinteoir tinn nó má tá ar mhúinteoir dul ar chúrsa inseirbhíse agus mar sin de, cén chaoi a dhéanann na finnétithe é sin? Cá bhfaigheann siad ionadaithe? Cén chaoi a n-éiríonn leo é sin a dhéanamh? Cén tábhacht breise a bheadh leis na liúntais? Tá sé luaite go raibh liúntais ann ach go bhfuil siad imithe. Cén fáth go mbeadh iad sin ina gcuidiú dá dtabharfadh ar ais iad?

Tá rud luaite anseo ó thaobh an dheontas Gaeilge agus dhátheangachais nach bhfuil ar fáil do na scoileanna faoi scáth na gcoistí gairmoideachais. Ní thuigim cén fáth go bhfuil sé sin amhlaidh. Cén mhíniú a thugann an Roinn Oideachais agus Scoileanna do na finnétithe nach mbeadh sé sin ar fáil sna scoileanna de chuid na choistí gairmoideachais, mar a bhí? Ní thuigim é. B'fhéidir go mbeadh na finnétithe in ann tuilleadh míniú a thabhairt dúinn maidir leis an gceist áirithe sin. Ó thaobh an stádas DEIS, an bhfuil aon mhíniú faighte ag na finnétithe cén fáth nach mbeadh siad i dteideal stádas DEIS? Tá a fhios agam go maith gur cheist é DEIS atá ardaithe ag comhaltaí éagsúla. Tuigim go bhfuil caipíní éagsúla ag na múinteoirí atá ós mo chomhair anseo, de réir mar a thuigim, ní hamháin dóibh gur múinteoirí agus tuismitheoirí iad, ach in áiteanna áirithe is baill boird bainistíochta ó thaobh na bunscoileanna iad freisin. B'fhéidir go mbeidh na finnétithe in ann breis a insint dom maidir leis na riachtanais faoi leith atá ag na bunscoileanna ar na hoileáin. Ceapaim go gcuideodh sé sin linn agus muid ag iarraidh na tuarascalacha a chur i dtoll a chéile. Táimid thar a bheith buíoch do na finnétithe. Tá

cás cumasach curtha os ár gcomhair acu. Tá siad ag tabhairt dúshláin mór dúinn feidhmiú ar an ábhar seo, seachas a bheith ag caint faoi, amach anseo.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Gabhaim buíochas le gach duine atá tagtha isteach go dtí an comhchoiste seo inniu. Mar a dúirt an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh, tá na finnéithe tar éis an scéal a thabhairt dúinn. Tá mé sásta go bhfuil a lán eolais agam nach raibh agam roimh an gcrúinniú seo. D'éist mé leis an Uasal Ó Culáin nuair a dúirt sé go bhfuil sé ag taistil ó chomhchoiste go chomhchoiste. Measaim go bhfuil sé ag an gcomhchoiste ceart inniu. Táimid chun éisteacht leis. Ní oibríonn an coiste seo ar bhealach atá scoilte ar bhonn na bpáirtithe. Is féidir liom a rá, tar éis dom an cheist seo a phlé le mo chomhghleacaí, an Teachta Ó Cuív, go bhfuil mé, mar Theachta ar bhinsí an Fhreasúra, chun polasaí maidir leis na hoileáin a scríobh ar son mo pháirtí. Tá geallúint á thabhairt agam go mbeidh polasaí i dtaobh na ceiste seo againn má táimid sa Rialtas amach anseo.

Mar a dúirt an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh, is é an rud is tábhachtaí atá á lorg ag na finnéithe ná cothrom na Féinne. Tá sé mar sprioc comónta ag gach éinne go mbeidh acmhainní agus airgead ar fáil chun na scoileanna a riaradh agus dul i ngleic leis na costais níos mó atá ag na scoileanna sin. Tá mé sásta bheith ag plé leis sin. Tá rud nó dhó ráite faoi. Dúirt an tUasal Gilmore go bhfuil na boird oideachais agus oiliúna ag fanacht ar chruinniú leis an Aire. B'fhéidir go mbeidh an Cathaoirleach in ann scríobh chuig an Aire maidir leis sin. Measim go mbeidh an comhchoiste in ann scríobh chuig an Roinn maidir leis an scoil ar Inis Meáin, agus i gcomhthéacs an ceangail atá ag an bord leis an scoil in Indreabhán.

Maidir leis na fadhbanna eile, agus an éileamh atá ann go ginearálta, tá sé ráite agam le mo chomhghleacaithe ar an gcomhchoiste - mar a dúirt mé, oibríonn muid le chéile - go bhfuil mé den tuairim gur féidir linn tuarascáil a scríobh i ndiaidh an chruinnithe seo agus é a chur os comhair na Dála nuair atá sé scríofa againn. Measaim gur féidir leis na baill atá anseo obair a dhéanamh inár bpáirtithe féin. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil díomá orm nach bhfuil éinne ó Fhine Gael anseo. Níl mórán daltaí nó múinteoirí i gceist anseo, i ndáiríre. Is jab beag é i gcomhthéacs an chórais iomlán oideachais.

Caithfidh cothrom na Féinne a bhaint amach do na scoileanna atá á bplé againn inniu ionas go mbeidh na pobail ar na hoileáin go léir in ann maireachtáil ar na hoileáin. Bhí eagla orm nuair a chuala mé an tUasal Ó Culáin ag rá go bhfuil “daonra na n-oileán ag crosbhóthar”. Má chailleann muid é sin, beidh a lán rudaí eile caillte againn freisin. Tá sé i gceist agam tús a chur le polasaí a scríobh ar son mo pháirtí. Measaim gur féidir leis an gcomhchoiste obair níos tábhachtaí a dhéanamh trí tuarascáil a fhoilsiú. Caithfidh gach ball den choiste obair le chéile má tá sé sin le tarlú.

Gabhaim buíochas leis an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh, a bhí páirteach i riaradh an chruinnithe seo. Gabhaim buíochas freisin leis na finnéithe a thaistil anseo. Tá sé dochreidte go raibh orthu fágaint inné, i lár an gheimhridh, agus go mbeidh orthu filleadh ar ais ar a gcuid scoileanna agus a gceantair dúchais amárach. Tá súil agam go dtabharfaidh mé cuairt ar roinnt de na hoileáin an bhliain seo chugainn. B'fhéidir go bhfuil an cuspóir céanna i gceist ag na baill eile. Tá seans ann nach dtabharfaidh an tOireachtas cead dúinn cuairt a thabhairt ar gach oileán. B'fhéidir go rachfaimid go dtí oileán amháin i nDún na nGall agus ceann de na hOileáin Árann freisin.

**Senator Lynn Ruane:** I feel sad when I cannot communicate in Irish. The members and witnesses will have to put up with English for today. I was shocked to hear that in 2017 the islands are still operating from a policy framework that does not suit. The policy suits only schools on land. Many of my questions are naive and will expose how little people living in

the city know or understand about the islands. As I was writing down some of my questions I was saying to myself not to ask them, because they sound silly. I am really being exposed. I look at inequality in education so much and I have never looked at this. That shows that this is not where my attention has diverted to when I am looking at access, education and funding for minority groups. It does not seem to be sold that way in terms of disadvantage the way other places are sold. I do not understand why that is. I agree with the comments from my colleagues. It is very clear that *per capita* funding, teacher allocation and all those things need to go forward as recommendations in the report from this committee. Some of my questions are really basic.

In schools where there is only one teacher and a lack of subjects, or a lack of teachers that can specialise in particular subjects, what are the outcomes for students who go through island schools? Can the schools offer all the subjects that students need to get the third level degree that they would like in terms of their chosen careers? Certain subjects are needed for certain sciences. It may not be possible to lead into a career that a person would love to do when he or she is ready for third level. What are the outcomes and impacts on the students in terms of their leaving certificate?

Do many locals become teachers? Is it solely a matter of trying to recruit teachers onto the island or do people who live on the island actually look to become teachers within their own communities? Do many students leave the islands to get education or is all of the population being educated on the islands?

Why is the transport so bad? Why does it take days? Is it a weather thing or is that a really silly question? Why is it so unreliable and unpredictable to travel on and off the islands? I will probably regret asking these questions today. There will be a big headline somewhere. They do seem like basic questions but I think they will help me in learning and understanding and hopefully being able to advocate for the islands going forward in terms of getting what is needed.

**Deputy Catherine Martin:** Gabhaim buíochas leis na finnétithe atá i láthair inniu as an bpictiúr soiléir atá léirithe acu i dtaobh céard atá i gceist le hoideachas a chur ar fáil ar na scoileanna oileánda. Aontaím le Bríd Ní Dhonncha go bhfuil an scoil i gcroílár gach pobal, go háirithe ar na hoileáin. Muna ndéanfaimid beart de réir briathar san Oireachtas, agus má ligfimid ár maidí le scruth seachas bheith ag díriú ar thábhacht na Gaeltachta agus ar thábhacht na scoileanna seo, beimid uilig ciontach as slad a dhéanamh ar anam agus ar chuisle an náisiúin seo. Céard is féidir a dhéanamh chun múinteoirí óga a mhealladh agus a choimeád ar na hoileáin? An bhfuil maoiniú le haghaidh taistil i gceist? An bhfuil níos mó teagmháil agus taistil idir na hoileáin ag teastáil? An bhfuil deacrachtaí leis an idirbhliain a chur ar fáil sna meánscoileanna?

On Mr. Gilmore's dealings with the Department of Education and Skills and the Irish and bilingual grants, what is the Department's reason? I do not understand why these schools are not getting them. Ms McHugh's submission mentions that Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada on Arranmore does not have a school completion officer. Why is that? Do I presume that they do not have a home school liaison officer either? Those two roles are crucial.

Regarding granting independent status to Coláiste Naomh Eoin, I do not know the reason that has not been granted. I refer this to the delegates. I am a teacher myself. It must be nightmarish dealing with it from an administrative point of view. In the day-to-day role as a teacher that is the first thing learned off by heart for the most basic of things. I still know my teaching roll number. It is beyond ridiculous. I do not know how a principal is expected to run a school without that independent status or being able to have reports and exams electronically. I know

from my experience as a teacher that the Department of Education and Skills is constantly saying that we must move with the times yet here is a school being prevented from doing so. It is being pulled back all the time. What is the Department's defence for that?

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** Aontaím leis an bhfáilte a cuireadh roimh na finnétithe. Táimid buíoch dóibh as bheith linn inniu. Tá cas an-láidir déanta acu go léir. Beidh mé ag cur mo cheisteanna trí Bhéarla chun bheith intuigthe mar níl mé an-fhlúirseach. I will ask my questions in English. I agree with Deputy Thomas Byrne. We should put forward proposals ourselves as a committee. I would like to understand what we should be recommending a little bit more. Senator Ruane has expressed very well how badly the witnesses have been served and how the equality issue has not reached as far as the islands. I want to really understand what is required. I remember Mr. Gilmore putting forward a very strong case back in 2015.

I believe it was Mr. Mac Pháidín who talked about the Irish and bilingual grant. I do not understand why that is not available on the islands if it is available to schools on the mainland who might have things a lot easier, although they would probably say that they do not have it very easy either. Perhaps Mr. Mac Pháidín could explain why it is not available. It seems as if it would make a big difference if it went to the island schools. Is that a possible answer? I believe Ms. Ní Dhonncha made a case for having a different pupil-teacher ratio. Should that be in our submission? I would just like to understand what would actually make a difference.

On the DEIS issue, some of the primary schools have DEIS status but the post-primary schools do not. It would seem to make total sense for both to have it when the schools are dealing with the same children. DEIS status would also make a difference. I would like to know exactly what we should be recommending to solve the witnesses' issues. The biggest problem, for the post-primary schools in particular, are probably the issues of having enough teachers and enough subjects and the difficulty in getting people to come live, work and teach on the island. We need to be able to make a good case in that regard as well.

Ms Ní Fhátarta does not have a roll number and, as I understand it, does not even have principal status, yet she is running one of the bigger schools on the islands. I believe she referred to a review of the second level school management system which is being conducted by the Department of Education and Skills. One of the proposals we should make is that her school should be given its own status. I was in the position of being education Minister for a couple of years but I do not understand why her school would not have individual status. She has a very particular case.

Overall, all the witnesses have made a really strong case and have described the difficulties very well. As a committee we should make strong recommendations. It does not represent a big cost because there are not all that many such schools. If we were to create a particular situation for island schools - and again I have been in the position and know that there is always concern that when something is changed there will be a knock-on effect all over the country - I do not think anybody else could make a case to be included in any such specific status or for any supports which could be given in such cases. I thank the witnesses and I hope we can make some strong recommendations.

**Chairman:** I will now call on non-members of the committee. This is the first committee meeting at which we have had such good attendance from non-members. It is very much appreciated. It must give comfort to the witnesses that the time they took to come here and engage with us is so appreciated.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** Is mór is fiú é an cruinniú seo a bheith ann. Is deas na baill den choiste a fheiceáil anseo ó thús go deireadh mar go minic ag cruinnithe coiste anseo imíonn daoine de réir a chéile. Ar an gcéad dul síos, failtím roimh an méid a bhí le rá ag an Teachta Thomas Byrne go bhfuil sé i gceist ag Fianna Fáil polasaí a fhorbairt. Ar ndóigh, tá na hoileáin féin tar éis polasaí a chur le chéile so beidh sé éasca é sin a dhéanamh. Le páipéir an chruinnithe seo fuair muid teistiméireachtaí ó roinnt scoláirí ón mórthír a chuaigh go dtí na hoileáin. Is fiú d'éinne a bhfuil spéis acu sa scéal seo iad a léamh mar tugann siad scéal thar a bheith dearfach ó thaobh na scoláirí de - is cuma ón oileán nó ó thaobh amuigh den oileán iad - faoin mbuntáiste mór a bhaineann le hoideachas ar na hoileáin i láthair na huaire.

Dúradh rud ar ball faoi chritéir eacnamaíochta. Tuigim an rud a bhí i gceist ach caithfidh mé a rá i gcónaí nuair a thagann siad ar na hoileáin, níl aon loighic ann. Is é sin le rá, mura gcuirtear fuinneamh iomlán isteach i seirbhísí den scoth a chur ar fáil, go mórmhór seirbhísí oideachais, tiocfaidh meath ar an daonra agus beidh sé sin i bhfad Éireann níos costasaí go hiomlán ar an Stát ná mar atá sé pobal inmharthana óg a choinneáil ar na hoileáin. Mura bhfuil ann ach seandhaoine bheadh costas as cuimse i gceist. Mar sin, tá sé níos eacnamúla polasaí foirfe láidir a bheith i gceist. Ó thaobh an cultúr de, táimid fós ag fuarchaoineadh an rud a tharla sa 1950í ar na Blascaodaí. Tá an cultúr a bhí ar an mBlascaod Mór chomh beo boidheach i gcónaí ar na hoileáin Gaeltachta go mórmhór.

Tá súil agam nuair a bheas an polasaí á scríobh ag an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh go gcuireann sé roinnt rudaí san áireamh. Molaim é as ucht an obair sin a dhéanamh mar tá obair mhór i gceist. De réir mar a thuigim is ceann de na rudaí a theastaíonn ná deontais reatha breise ó bhliain go bliain mar tá costais breise ar oileáin. An dara rud ná, go ginearálta, leithroinnt múinteoirí, gach a ghabhann leis sin agus chuile chineál cúnaimh níos airde a bheith ar fáil.

Ní bheinn ag iarraidh stádas DEIS do na hoileáin. Ba cheart go mbeadh stádas oileánda faoi leith ann d'oileáin mar beidh an Roinn Oideachas agus Scileanna nó duine éigin amach anseo ag rá nach bhfuil siad cáilithe do DEIS mar tá dúshlán difriúla ar oileáin ó thaobh na dúshláin DEIS. Mar sin, b'fhearr liom stádas oileánda a fheiceáil. Níl i gceist ach 12 bunscoil agus cúig mheánscoil. Ba buile úafásach é ó thaobh múinteoirí a mhealladh nuair a cuireadh deireadh leis an liúntas oileánda, an liúntas Gaeltachta agus an liúntas Gaeilge ar mhaithe le pingíní. Feictear dom go raibh an Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe ag fanacht ar an deis sin le fada an lá agus gur thapaigh siad an ghéarchéim mar dheis. Ní hé go shábháil sé aon airgead ach níor thaitin sé leis an Roinn. Ní chosnódh sé tada iad a chur ar ais.

Bhí baint agam leis an scéim scoláireachtaí a cuireadh ar bun. Ó bheith ag caint leis na scoileanna ar na hOileáin Árann, ní bheadh siad leath chomh beo boidheach agus atá siad mu-rach an scéim sin. Ba bhreá liom an scéim sin a fheiceáil ag leathnú go Tír Chonaill. Is é an trua nach bhfuil leas a bhaint as i dTír Chonaill. Bheadh súil agam go mbeadh an Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta sasta leasú agus forbairt a dhéanamh ar an scéim sin mar caithfear a thuiscint an leas atá sé á dhéanamh do ghasúir ón mórthír dul ar na hoileáin ó thaobh foghlaim na Gaeilge agus fhorbairt phearsanta de.

Caithfear liúntais a chur ar fáil le foirgnimh chuí a chur ar fáil. Tá sé sin ina ghéarchéim in Inis Meáin. Tá fadhbanna in Inis Oírr. Go ginearálta, caithfear déanamh cinnte go bhfuil foirgnimh den scoth ar fáil agus aitheantas a thabhairt go gcosnaíonn sé níos mó togáil ar oileáin ná mar a chosnaíonn sé ar an mórthír. Ní thuigim cén fáth nach bhfuil an t-aitheantas faighte in Inis Meáin. Bhí cúlra áirithe ag baint le hInis Meáin. Bhí daoine ag rá nach mbeadh aon rath ar scoil ar Inis Meáin. B'fhéidir gurb é Inis Meáin an sampla is fearr den mhéid is féidir le scoil a dhéanamh ar oileán. D'fheadfá a rá go raibh Inis Meáin ar tí a bháis ó thaobh daoine óga

a bheith ar an oileán. Tá athbheochan dochreidte tagtha ar an oileán le cúpla bliain anuas, sa bhunscoil agus sa mheánscoil. Creidim gur chuidigh na scoláireachtaí go mór leis sin mar gur chabhraigh na scoláirí a tháinig scoileanna inmharthana d'ardchaighdeán a chur ar fáil.

Cuireadh béim ar fhadhbanna anseo inniu. Ag deireadh an lae, is dóigh liom go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go dtabharfadh muid aitheantas do na torthaí dochreidte acadúla agus don fhorbairt pearsanta atá ag teacht as na scoileanna seo. Tá sé spéisiúil go bhfuil gasúir ó chuid de na scoileanna is iomráití sa tír ag dul chuig na scoileanna ar na hoileáin ar feadh bliana agus ag fanacht ar feadh dhá bhliain nó trí bliana. Táispeánann sé sin caighdeán na scoileanna. Mar sin, nílimid ag iarraidh rud den dara ghrád. Ní thugadh muid tacaíocht dá leithéid. Tá tacaíocht á thabhairt againn do rud as a dtiocfaidh toradh thar cionn.

Dá dtabharfaí €1 milliún in aghaidh na bliana, ní bheadh i gceist ach 0.01% de bhuiséad na Roinne. Is í an fhírinne ná nach fhéadfaí a leithéid de sholáthar a áireamh mar chaiteachas laistigh de chaiteachas iomlán na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna. Níl aon droichead ag aon cheann de na hoileáin seo. Is fíor-oileáin gach aon cheann acu. Faraoir géar, ní bheidh mórán scoileanna nua á oscailt ar na hoileáin amach ón gcósta amach anseo. Ní fadhb airgid ó thaobh na Roinne atá i gceist anseo. Is fadhb airgid ó thaobh na scoileanna atá ann. Ní fasach é ach oiread. Fuair muid é sin amach le chuile shórt a rinne muid ar na hoileáin. Ní fasach é don mhórtáir nuair a thugtar cúnamh do na hoileáin mar gur cásanna eisceachtúla amach is amach iad na hoileáin.

**Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill:** Tréaslaím leis na finnétithe as an gcur i láthair atá déanta acu anseo tráthnóna. Bhuail mé le cuid acu ag coiste eile roimhe seo. Tá go leor eolais ag teacht chun cinn anseo inniu i dtaca leis an bhfadhb mhór atá ag scoileanna ar na hoileáin. I mo thuairim, is féidir dul ar aghaidh anois leis an múnla atá curtha chun cinn ag na finnétithe os comhair an choiste seo inniu. Tá sé ráite ag an Teachta Byrne go bhfuil sé sásta polasaí úr náisiúnta a scríobh. Is é sin an rud atá ag teastáil. Aontáim leis an Teachta Ó Cuív go bhfuil i bhfad níos mó de dhíth ná stádas DEIS a bhronnadh ar scoileanna cosúil le Scoil Cholmcille. Cé go mbeadh sé cinnte ina bhuntáiste, ní réiteach na faidhbe é stádas DEIS. Tá fadhb níos mó anseo agus baineann sé le cúrsaí polasaithe náisiúnta.

Ba mhaith liom dhá cheist mhór a ardú sa chomhthéacs seo: inmharthanacht na hoileáin mar áiteanna cónaithe do dhaoine agus tsli ina bhfuil daoine á dílárnú amach as ceantair tuaithe isteach go dtí bailte móra. Má ligfidimid do na hoileáin imeacht de réir a chéile, is cinnte go n-imeoidh na scoileanna fosta. Maidir le ceist an dílárnaithe, mar chuid den national planning framework atá foilsithe ag an Rialtas mar straitéis náisiúnta, tá polasaí mór leagtha amach i dtaoibh na háiteanna ina bheidh daoine ina gcónaí, ag obair agus ag fáil a gcuid oideachais. Nuair a fhoilsíodh an chéad chuid den pholasaí, ní raibh mórán ann faoi na hoileáin. Tá súil agam go mbeidh níos mó mar gheall ar na hoileáin sa pholasaí iomlán nuair atá sé foilsithe ag an Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála agus Rialtais Áitiúil, go háirithe ós rud é go bhfuil go leor aighneachtaí déanta ag eagrais éagsúla. Tá sé tábhachtach ó thaobh daonra de go mbeadh daoine ina gcónaí sna ceantair seo. Tá an dá rud ag dul le chéile. Má tá oideachas ar fáil i gceantar tuaithe nó ar oileán, beidh daoine sásta fanacht san áit sin agus bheith ina gcónaí san áit sin. Ní féidir é a dhéanamh in éagmais pholasaí náisiúnta ó thaobh tacaíocht a thabhairt do na scoileanna beaga seo.

Tá sé soiléir dom, ó bheith ag plé leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna i dtaca le scoileanna beaga go ginearálta agus go háirithe leis na scoileanna ar na hoileáin, nach bhfuil suim ag lucht na Roinne sna scoileanna seo. Ní thuigeann siad na fadhbanna éagsúla atá acu. Úsáideann siad value for money mar leithscéal go minic. Ní féidir an cruth sin a chur i bhfeidhm i gcomhthéacs na scoileanna oileánda. Ní aithníonn an Roinn go bhfuil slat tomhais eile ag

baint le scoileanna beaga. Níl an Roinn ag tabhairt aitheantas don saghas foghlaim ná do na outcomes atá ar fáil sna scoileanna beaga. Nuair a chuir siad tuarascáil ar scoileanna beaga le chéile sa bhliain 2012, chaith siad amach an saineolas idirnáisiúnta go léir agus dúirt siad nach mbaineann sé le hÉireann. Ní chreidim é sin. Caithfidh mé a rá nach glacaim leis.

Mar a dúirt an Teachta Ó Cuív, tá torthaí acadúla, cultúrtha agus oidhreachtúla i measc na buntáistí atá ag baint leis na scoileanna beaga atá ar na hoileáin seo. Measaim go bhfuil an ceart ag an Teachta Byrne dul ar aghaidh le polasaí a chur le chéile a bheidh an Roinn sásta glacadh leis agus a bheidh Teachtaí agus Seanadóirí sásta cur tríd Tithe an Oireachtais. Tá sé i gceist anseo aitheantas ceart a thabhairt do na scoileanna Gaeltachta. Aithním an dea-obair atá déanta ag an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh leis na rudaí seo ar fad a tharraingt le chéile. Tá súil agam go mbeidh torthaí le feiceáil gan mhoill ag teacht amach as an gcruinniú seo. Is cinnte go mbeidh gach éinne anseo sásta tacaíocht a thabhairt don sprioc sin. Is mór an trua é nach bhfuil Teachta nó Seanadóir ar bith ó thaobh an Rialtais i láthair. I mo thuairim, is droch-chomhartha é sin. Tá súil agam go mbeidh Teachtaí agus Seanadóirí an Rialtais in ann an t-easnamh sin a mhíniú.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** Tá an Ghaeilge go seomra seo go hálainn, ach tá mo chuid Gaeilge féin go huafásach. Mar sin, leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh as Béarla. I thank the Chair for facilitating non-members of the committee this evening. I thank the Chair and Senator Ó Clochartaigh, a good Galwegian who understands the islands, for organising this meeting during Christmas week.

I was amused by Senator Ruane's question about people travelling for two days to get to the islands. My father spent his life travelling to the islands. We did not electrify them - we gas-lit and gas-refrigerated them. He was known in those days as "Larry mór". I remember Larry mór being stranded on Tory Island for four weeks, which shows it is not easy to get in and out from the islands.

Does Mr. Mac Pháidín agree with me that the pupil-teacher ratio for teacher allocation is totally and utterly inappropriate for island communities? It is simply not possible to follow a pupil-teacher ratio.

I should congratulate the educational authorities in Donegal and Galway-Roscommon on maintaining the secondary and primary schools on the islands. When the teachers and principals went to work on the islands, I am sure they did not realise they would become plumbers, electricians and information technology experts, as well as being teachers in their spare time. We all compliment them on their efforts.

As these are not ordinary primary or secondary schools, the usual levels of finance cannot be allocated to them to meet their running costs. I would be particularly interested in getting some information about the participation of children from island schools in national events like the Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition. Leaving aside the cost to their families, how is it possible to bring children from the islands to such events? How can it be guaranteed that they will be able to travel on the day? For me, that is a huge question. We talk a lot in this country about heritage and culture and we clap ourselves on the back in relation to Dublin 4, the National Concert Hall and other such establishments. Culture and heritage is the lifeblood of the islands. It is great that Ms Ní Fhátharta returned to work on Inis Meáin following completion of her training on the mainland. Would the witnesses agree that the way to kill an island community is to send children off-island to secondary school? I lived next door to Coláiste Éinde on Threadneedle Road in Salthill, where most of the students were boarders from the islands. As I understand it, there is no longer an education facility on Clare Island off the coast of Mayo. My

sister used to accommodate some of the children in Louisburgh when they came across for their second level education. I have a huge affinity with the islands, particularly the Aran Islands. I probably travelled on the first Dún Aengus to the Aran Islands. My family went there a lot. My sister previously owned the hotel on Inis Oírr. The most inaccessible island in my day was Inis Meáin. One had to go there by currach at that time. I do not know how those currently working on the island get there.

There has been some discussion on the issue of the virtual classroom, which is fine if one is living in Dublin and has 100 megabit broadband inwards and one gigabit broadband outwards. How does information technology facilitate education in the island schools given their remoteness and the unpredictability of broadband provision? I understand virtual classrooms have been trialled on the Aran Islands. Has Mr. Ó Culáin had any experience in that regard and, if so, could it work? Even if we were to provide for virtual classrooms such that, for example, a physics teacher in Galway city could deliver a physics class on Inis Mór, Inis Oírr or Inis Meáin or a national school teacher could teach music across the Internet, at the end of the day there would still be a need to have somebody in the classroom supervising the children and therein lies the problem with the pupil-teacher ratio, PTR.

Mr. Mac Pháidín mentioned the issue of delivering 28 hours curriculum per week. Is it the case that the schools are not able to deliver the full 28 hours or are they doubling up on standard subjects in order to fulfil the 28 hours? There are only five islands still providing secondary education. It may well be the case soon that there will be no secondary education on the islands and 12 year old children will be leaving the islands again for boarding schools. That is unacceptable. My colleague, Deputy Byrne, adverted to the fact that there is nobody here from Fine Gael. I am deeply disappointed that there is no Government voice in this room to hear the witnesses' voice.

**Chairman:** Coming from Kildare, which is one of the most midland counties, I did not grow up with knowledge of island schools. When I became a primary school teacher I had the very good fortune to have a vice principal from Inis Oírr who was an excellent colleague and is a much valued friend to this day. I was pleased to have an opportunity to visit the islands and the schools there with her. I have visited all of the islands, except for Tory Island. I look forward to the invitation to visit it. I visited Clare Island about three years ago. The community there is alive and well. Every winter the community there puts on a play and every person on the island has a part in it, which begs the question of who is in the audience. It is a fantastic place. Our islands have wonderful communities. Their pride and passion is evident when one visits them. The way of life and the culture and heritage on our islands is special. I agree with my colleague's comments that when children leave the islands at age ten, 11 or 12 is the start of their journey away, leading to living on the islands no longer being sustainable, as happened in the case of the Blasket Islands. For many of us our first contact with island life was through reading Peig and it is sad that there are no longer people living there.

I support all that my colleagues have said. If there is additional information which the witnesses believe would help inform our recommendations and report to the Minister they should forward it to the committee secretariat. The committee has heard loud and clear the challenges in terms of teacher allocation. I had thought that the additional allowance for teachers which was in place when I was teaching was still in existence but I learned in preparation for this meeting that it has been withdrawn. I believe that is wrong. We need to address that issue. I am disappointed to learn that there is no difference in the capitation grant. It is an issue on which we will make a recommendation, taking into account the higher cost of living on the islands.

We have come across a lot of anomalies with the DEIS system. It is completely wrong that a primary school in an area would have DEIS status and a secondary school in the same area would not. My colleague, Deputy Thomas Byrne, has highlighted many anomalies in this area which we will try to address in the context of our recommendations and report. Mr. Ó Cúláin mentioned that an additional €10,000 per annum would go a long way. Given the small number of schools involved it is an issue that needs to be examined. I was shocked to learn that the €103 funding per student allowed in other areas as an Irish and bilingual grant is not available to the island schools. These are all areas that the committee needs to investigate and make recommendations on. I am confused about the situation in relation to Coláiste Naomh Éinne and Coláiste Colmcille. It makes no sense and we will take that issue on board. I know how hard teaching principals on the islands, and on the mainland, work but doing that work and not having the recognition or status of a principal is completely wrong. We will do all we can to help to address that issue.

Before we conclude, I invite the witnesses who wish to respond to the questions posed by my colleagues to do so at this point or to forward further written submissions to the committee secretariat following today's exchange.

**Mr. Tomás Mac Pháidín:** Before I respond to any of the specific issues raised, my colleague, Ms Anne McHugh, CEO of Donegal Education and Training Board, asked me to apologise on her behalf for leaving and to tell the committee that she will supply further information to it via email.

A number of the issues raised and a lot of the specific questions asked relate to the absence of policy. If there was a policy in place within the relevant Department to address these issues, it would make it much easier to have the individual line items tackled. As far as I understand it, the deontas dátheangach nó lán-Ghaeilge is made available to the non-ETB coláistí lán-Ghaeilge and Gaeltachta. The voluntary secondary schools would get it but no ETB school does. All of the other grants, subject specific or transition year moneys - all of the other line items, about 80 of them in total - are the same for everybody. That is the only one that is excluded and by virtue of that it is not available to the island schools, which are in the ETB category. In a previous existence as a príomhoide, I would have been writing to the Department as far back as 2010 looking into that. We never got any reasoning as to why it is given to some and not to others. There is correspondence going back quite a while. That would address the financial aspects. As an ETB we have eight coláistí lán-Ghaeilge and Gaeltachta. That grant would be worth approximately €128,000 per annum. We have three island schools here saying that if they got €30,000 it would address a lot of their issues but it is not possible because it requires a policy change, and the officials cannot change policy, only the Minister can. All of those issues are captured within that.

The issue of the virtual classroom was raised. There were attempts, particularly between Coláiste Cholm Cille and Coláiste Naomh Eoin, to broaden the curriculum. Ceol was one of the areas. It was quite patchy. It sounds good on paper but we are dealing with broadband of variable quality. Broadband has improved in all schools in recent years. Certainly, as the technology improves, the likelihood of that happening will increase. It still requires a múinteoir sa seomra ranga. Caithfidh duine a bheith ann. There still needs to be somebody there at all times, so we would actually be doubling up.

On the 28-hour week, I had better put on the record that we are complying with the 28-hour week but in that compliance, we struggle to provide the subject options that are required. That is a regulatory requirement. It is being provided for, but the cost of that is that we have first

and second years being taught together across the entire subject range, as Ms Ní Dhonnchadha indicated. This is a real difficulty when there are small numbers in the class groups. Notwithstanding the numbers being small, gach uile scoláire, every last one of them, needs their full education be they first, second or transition year. There is transition year in a number of the island schools. It is still very difficult.

Táimid ag iarraidh go mbeidh rogha ábhair - subject options - ar fáil do gach scoláire. Ba cheart go mbeadh an réimse céanna ann agus atá in áiteanna eile. Tá deacracht ann ar dhá leibhéal, dáileadh na múinteoirí ina measc. Níl dóthain acmhainn múinteoireachta ag an scoil chun subject options a chur ann agus tá sé deacair na múinteoirí a mhealladh dá réir. Given the size of the schools, there will never be a full post in many of these specialist subject areas. There might be eight or ten hours of woodwork or ten or 12 hours of home economics or whatever. A case in point would be eacnamaíocht bhaile in Inis Oírr. We have advertised a position seven times since last May. It is still vacant. There are exam students in the middle of this scenario. As an ETB with 19 other schools, we have teachers going out on rotation doing emergency relief. That is ongoing in the current year. This is an escalating problem which we have in a number of subject areas. There are zero applications or possibly one applicant, and when they realise where the post is they decide it is not for them because the costs will not allow them to take a part-time position over four or five days when they have two sets of domestic costs to carry for themselves.

**Mr. Mícheál Ó Culáin:** An féidir liom tagairt a dhéanamh do na scoláireachtaí? Senator Ó Clochartaigh and Deputy Connolly asked a question about the possibilities for transition year students and travel. To give an example of the differences the scholarships have made to us this year, we got an increase from the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Kyne, last year as a kind of emergency measure because our numbers were falling. The increase was from ten to 15 scholarships for the year. That meant that I have 15 scholarships in transition year as well as nine local students. For the first time in an awful long time, the school had a senior football team. We could go to the mainland and compete with other schools. That has raised their expectations and the atmosphere in the school. It is absolutely brilliant. That is what these scholarships bring to us.

As for travel, last Thursday there was a meeting of Comhairle na nÓg, the local youth council in Leitir Mór on the mainland. I was going to bring nine students to that meeting. The night before, I was talking to the skipper of the boat and he said he did not think there would be a boat. The boat usually leaves at 8.15 a.m. At 8.30 that morning, coming into school, I got a phone call that it would leave in ten minutes. I gathered up all the students and off we went down to the pier and out. They had a brilliant day at Comhairle na nÓg, not knowing, by the way, whether we would be back that evening. What contingency plans I had in place, I do not know. We have to think as we go along.

The same thing happened us last year. We have two world handball champions in our school, four all-Ireland champions, and the Galway competition for schools was happening on a certain day. The boat was not going in the morning. The next thing, at 10 o'clock, the weather calmed down a small bit and they asked us did we want to go. I said well, we had to go. I brought them and they won their matches and it was absolutely great. They are the difficulties that we face and that our students face day to day.

I do not know why they stay with us really, to be honest. At times it is difficult for them. If they have to train or do anything, and these lads are world champions, they have to do all their training on the mainland. They would be gone weekends. That is the commitment they have.

How long are people going to do that unless we support them? How long are people willing to live on the islands unless it is worthwhile for them? It is much easier to leave the island and live on the mainland. That is my worry. I absolutely think it is a great thing that we are writing a policy on this but how long is it going to take before we see benefits? It is still a worry for me.

On the virtual reality or the virtual room. Our Internet went down last Thursday. We have a great IT department in Galway and Roscommon ETB and usually they are able to sort the problem. Otherwise our server providers look after it and there is never usually a problem. On this occasion, no one could help us. They got onto the Department, which got onto the broadband provider. We still could not nail down a technician to come to an island. How would that be if Senator Craughwell was supposed to be out in Galway teaching my class on Inis Mór? It might still be a very good thing to have lectures and stuff that we miss out on. We might not have to travel as much. I do not know about replacing a teacher with Internet, though. I do not know.

**Ms Deirdre O'Connor:** Ba mhaith liom dhá rud a rá mar fhreagra ar cheist a bhí ag an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh. Is léir go bhfuil buntáistí ag baint le liúntais a bheith ann do mhúinteoirí atá ag obair ar na hoileáin. Tá sé soiléir nach é oiléan an chéad áit ar a mbíonn duine ag smaoineamh agus é nó í ag lorg post mar mhúinteoir. Tá gá ann daoine a mhealladh chun a bheith ag obair ar na hoileáin. Tá na costais breise luaite ag roinnt mhaith daoine. B'fhéidir go gcaitheann múinteoirí ar na hoileáin dhá chíos a íoc. Tá tábhacht leis an liúntas sin. Bhí sé aitheanta nuair a bhíomar sa choláiste. Mar a dúirt an Chathaoirleach, bhí sé i gcónaí i mbéal an phobail go raibh an rud seo ann chun daoine a tharraingt isteach go dtí na hoileáin.

Maidir leis na riachtanais speisialta atá ag na bunscoileanna, an chéad rud ná go bhfuil roinnt de na fadhbanna agus na riachtanais i gcoitinne ag na scoileanna beaga ar na hoileáin agus ag na scoileanna beaga ar an mórthír. Tá costais bhreise a bhaineann leis an gcuraclam a sholáthar. Mar shampla, má tá siad ag iarraidh aquatics nó snámh, atá mar chuid den churacclam corpoideachais, a chur ar fáil i mbunscoil, caithfidh siad dul isteach agus teacht amach. Chun an réimse leathan curaclaim a chur ar fáil, tá riachtanais speisialta ag na scoileanna ar na hoileáin. Tá gá fosta le forbairt ghairmiúil do na múinteoirí agus tá gá le traenáil don bhord bainistíochta. Nuair atá scoil dhá oide ann, tá ochtar mar chuid den bhord bainistíochta agus tá tacaíocht agus forbairt de dhíth ag na daoine sin agus iad ag dul i mbun oibre.

Ó thaobh chúrsaí earcaíochta de, nuair atá múinteoir sa bhreis ann agus redeployment ar siúl idir scoil ar an mórthír agus scoil ar oiléan, braitheann sé seo ar an méid ciliméadar idir na scoileanna. Nuair atá farraige i gceist idir an dá scoil, tá deacracht ansin.

**Ms Bríd Ní Dhonncha:** Le cur leis an méid a bhí á rá ag an tUasal Mac Phaidín, ó Mheán Fómhair seo caite tá deacrachtaí ann múinteoir eacnamaíocht bhaile a earcú. Táimid fós ag lorg múinteoir. Luaigh sé freisin na socrúithe sealadacha agus múinteoirí ag teacht amach. Bhain muid triail as an virtual classroom, b'fhéidir trí seachtainí ó shin. Ní raibh ann ach teist. Láithreach ní raibh an WiFi sách láidir. Chomh maith, tá gá go mbeadh na hamchláir ag meaitseáil: nuair atá tíos ar siúl in Inis Oírr, tá gá go mbeadh tíos ar siúl i gcibé scoil a bheadh muid ceangailte leis. Chomh maith leis sin, mar a luaigh muid cheana, theastódh go mbeadh múinteoir leis na scoláirí. B'fhéidir ar pháipéar go mbreathnaíonn sé gur réiteach é ach ní bheifeá ag iarraidh a bheith ag brath air. Mar a luaigh an tUasal Ó Culáin, táimid ag brath ar an WiFi. Laethanta ní bhíonn fiú an gléas fótachóipeála ag obair mar tá sé ar fad ceangailte leis an Idirlín. Ag iarraidh duine a fháil amach le hé a réiteach agus a shocrú, táimid ag caint ar laethanta.

**Chairman:** I understand. Go raibh maith agat. I call Ms Ní Chartúir.

**Ms Anna Ní Chartúir:** Chun cur leis an bpointe sin faoin virtual classroom, tá sé ráite go sonrach sa bpolasaí oideachais Gaeltachta go mbeidh píolótú á dhéanamh air seo i ndá scoil. Níl sé ráite fós cén scoileanna, ach beidh beirt mhúinteoirí breise ceadaithe do na scoileanna sin. Sílim go bhfuil sé tábhachtach súil a choinneáil air go bhfeicfidh muid an bhfuil aon scoileanna oileánda ar na scoileanna sin. Dar ndóigh, beidh deacrachtaí leis seo ó thaobh chúrsaí leathanbhanda agus mar sin de, ach tá deacrachtaí leathanbhanda ar an mórhír leis agus, tá faitíos orm, ní athróidh sé sin go luath.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** Bhí ceist-----

**Chairman:** I will wait and see if anybody else wants to come in, then I will let the Deputy in. I call Mr. Gilmore, I had his name down.

**Mr. Pat Gilmore:** In answer to Deputy Martin and in relation to the ETBI's engagement with the Department's officials. The general secretary and I had two engagements at a most senior level over a period of three years. We pointed out to the officials many of the challenges that were set out here today. We found in talking to them that while they were listening, there was a great reluctance to hear us. I thought there was also a lack of empathy, a lack of appreciation, a lack of acknowledgement and a lack of understanding of how island schools operate and the challenges that they face.

They did say that when the Gaeltacht education policy is published, possibly some of the things raised will be comprehended in it in terms of solutions. Of course, that did not happen. We did point out that any initiatives that they might take in terms of once-off expenditures, in the context of island schools, would not see any follow-on for further schools. In other words it would be ring-fenced. There would be safety for the Department in that context. I am not sure if Deputy O'Sullivan will recall, but both myself and the general secretary suggested on two occasions the possibility of setting up a task group that would look at all aspects and challenges facing island schools. That would bring forward proposals which would inform policy in relation to island schools. If it can be recalled, the Deputy said at the time that she might give it some consideration. I understand that these things are not easy to move along either. However, I saw potential in that and I still think there might be potential in it.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** Senator Ruane asked a fair question and it may be important to get the answer on the record. How many islanders are not going to the secondary schools on the island? It would be useful to put it on the record because I think I know the answer. It is a fair test of how good they are.

**Mr. Tomás Mac Pháidín:** Some 100% go to school on the islands.

**Chairman:** Who wants to respond to that?

**Mr. Tomás Mac Pháidín:** There is a broad range of challenges and difficulties and probably a degree of frustration. There have been, I think, three Oireachtas joint committees and a Cabinet subcommittee also looked at this in February. There is no report from that because of Cabinet confidentiality. However, it was a Cabinet subcommittee meeting and arising from that the Department did engage in a meeting with us in March. A lot of the same issues were threshed out. As Mr. Ó Culáin has said, we have been around the houses on the various issues.

I think it is also important to put on the record the standard of the schools. I work with Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and Donegal Education and Training Board, so I am quiet familiar with our own three schools to a degree. I always knew that

those schools were there but I did not really know an awful lot about them prior to Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and Donegal Education and Training Board being established. They are excellent schools, very hard working and with great outcomes for students. Notwithstanding the limitations, 100% of the students from the island choose to go to school in their own home place, with all of the challenges and difficulties. They know they will be well minded and that everything that can be made available to them, will be made available to them and the supports that can be put in place, are put in place.

That does not in any way take from all of the challenges that we have laid out here before the committee. I refer to the community's concerns. When the ETBs were established in July of 2013, one of the first things that we as an ETB had to address was a concern from the island communities with this new monolith that was being created. Previously it had been a Vocational Education Committee with a much more local context. They might not be supported to the degree that they had been previously. The answer that was given, and it was followed through, was that as long as the island communities support their own schools, the ETB will continue to support them.

However, that comes at a cost. As an ETB, we made a decision across our 20 schools that we would provide a minimum funding per school of, I think, €27,000. That, in terms of Ms Ní Dhonnchadha's school, is €1,000 per pupil. That is many multiples of what we get from the central Exchequer. We are actually taking funds from a school elsewhere to give it to an island school. We are doing the same with teaching allocation to keep these schools open. The members' colleagues across the hall in the Committee of Public Accounts might have issues with us on some of those aspects. These are real issues that we struggle with day in, day out in terms of attracting staff, trying to keep them there once they are there, and to keep the subject range happening in a way that is manageable for students and for school management. Management structures have to be in place because these schools are very small. For example, even under the newly developed arrangements that are likely to be published in the next number of weeks, many of these schools will typically not have any assistant principal position. They will not reach the threshold of the nine wholtime equivalent teaching staff needed to generate an assistant principal position.

Ms Ní Fhátharta has already mentioned that there is neither a príomhoide nor a príomhoide tánaiste. There is no principal or deputy principal in the case of Inis Meáin.

It is not just a question of cash, and not just a question of teaching allocation. The schools need all of the support structures. They need management structures and access to the other services that the Department of Education and Skills and other Departments provide, such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. Those are very difficult to get on an island, and if we can get them, we cannot get them le Gaeilge. There is thus a double challenge involved in getting somebody. If we take the students off the island to avail of the services, they are back to the merry-go-round of being gone for two days at a time. These are huge issues; the staffing issue, the staffing allocation and the funding. The number of islands and island schools is small in the overall scheme of things. The figure of €1 million was mentioned. We have costed it, and approximately two thirds of that figure would solve all of the issues on the five islands. I am talking specifically about post-primary.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** An bhfuiltear ag cur isteach do scoláireachtaí breise? Tá. I have one other point to make very briefly.

**Ms Mairéad Ní Fhátharta:** My point has been more or less answered. Bhí cúpla rud an-

sin. Chuir duine éicint ceist faoin difríocht a dhéanann dara múinteoir do scoil oileáin. I gcás scoil náisiúnta Inis Meáin agus an dara mhúinteoir tá an difríocht dochreidte. Tá spiorad agus beocht fíor-bhríomhar sa scoil anois arís. Tá dóchas nua san oileán. Tréaslaím le haon duine a chabhraigh leis sin. Tá mé an-bhuíoch. Is difríocht an-mhór é. Cinnte gur todhchaí é sin do chuile oileán a bhfuil bunscoil orthu, ní hamháin Inis Meáin.

Bhí cúpla rud ansin maidir le clúdach agus cé atá ag clúdach domsa nuair a fhagaim an scoil. Déanann na múinteoirí garanna pearsanta dom. Tá sé an-deacair a bheith ag iarraidh gar pearsanta ar dhuine lá i ndiadh lae. Bhí orm imeacht go an-rialta leis an scoil a choinneáil beo, suas go dáta agus chun cinn. Le dul ar chruinniú, bíonn orm Inis Meáin a fhágáil ag 8 a.m. Bheadh an dheis caillte agam ag 8.30 a.m. Ní thagtar ar ais go dtí 7.30 p.m. Bíonn go leor garanna le hiarraidh agam ar dhaoine agus go minic ar mhúinteoirí nach bhfuil uaireanta lán-aimseartha acu agus nach bhfuil ag fáil aon liúntas mar gur múinteoirí óga iad a tháinig isteach san gcóras tar éis 2011. Ní fhaigheann siad aon aitheantas ar an obair. Tá siad ag déanamh é seo. Is freagracht mhór millteach le ghlacadh é. Déanaim é ach tuigim go bhfuil freagracht mór orm agus bím i gcónaí ag fiosrú cá seasaim. Bíonn mo chuid deacrachtaí féin agam leis ach bíonn sé an-deacair iarradh ar dhuine éicint eile an fhreagracht sin a ghlacadh. Sin a tharlaíonn. I mo chás caithim gar a iarradh ar dhuine éicint eile.

Bhí cúpla rud ansin. Labhair Mr. Ó Culáin ar an gcostas taistil a bhaineann le scoláirí a thabhairt aon áit nuair atáthar ar oileáin. B'fhéidir go bhfuil rang nach bhfuil ann ach ceathrar nó triúr. Is gnáthshaghas rang é seo i scoil oileáin. Dá gcaithfear bus a fháil go Baile Átha Luain nó Baile Átha Cliath le freastal ar rud éicint, ní féidir an costas a roinnt idir triúr nó ceathrar so caitheann an scoil é sin a chlúdach go minic. Caitheann an scoil an costas sin a iompar chomh maith le costais fanachta thar oíche agus rudaí mar sin. Bíonn múinteoirí ag taistil leo. Caitheann siad íoc as a bpóca féin ar dtús agus ansin é a fháil ar ais. Is ionann é sin agus mise ag samhlú go bhfuil an t-airgead acu le n-íoc ar dtús sula bhfaigheann siad ar ais é míonna i ndiadh. Arís is múinteoirí óga iad go minic. Tá go leor rudaí ag baint leis ach bíonn go leor deacrachtaí i gceist. Baineann freagrachtaí eile leis sin agus leis an mbeirt mhúinteoirí go rialta.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** I want to say something very briefly. We very rarely get soluble problems, and this is one. For a minuscule national investment, not only would we solve an education problem, we would solve the total problem of the viability of the island. The problems outlined here today are absolutely real. They are overcome by personal commitment. However, if a little bit of extra investment was put in, we would be absolutely guaranteed a top-quality product at the end, that of children getting a fantastic education. The number of children applying to go to the island schools is a testament to what is being done with the available resources. However, if what they get from the State kitty was increased by a fraction it would solve every problem they have, and we would be finished with this issue once and for all. I know of very few problems in this world upon which we could close the book and say the job was done if a small package of investment was awarded.

**Chairman:** That is true, and the islands are certainly forgotten about sometimes. It brings to mind a presentation on LocalLink, the rural bus transport service, about a month ago. The presentation took place in Buswells Hotel. I am genuinely passionate about supporting our rural communities, of which there are plenty in Kildare, and thankfully we have a very good LocalLink service. However, to examine transport links on a national basis, those giving the presentation used a map of Ireland with the islands missing. They were not even included. This was a discussion about linking communities at the lowest level, so that each community could be linked in with its closest neighbours. The fact that the islands had not even been considered

really took me by surprise. Policies should be island-proofed, for want of a better word, to see how they bear on the day-to-day practical realities shared by our witnesses. With the blessing of everybody here, I will give the last word to Senator Ó Clochartaigh, who has done a lot of work on this issue. He has agreed to serve as a rapporteur, and is doing excellent work on the area.

**Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh:** Níl mórán eile le rá. Tá sé ráite ag na finnétithe féin. Gabhaim buíochas leo arís. Má tá breis eolais acu, an gcuirfidh siad chugainn chomh luath agus is féidir, go háirithe ó thaobh bunscoileanna agus eile má tá taithí eile ansin? Cuirfimid an tuarascáil i dtoll a chéile chomh sciobtha agus is féidir linn. Trialfaidh muid freagra a fháil ón Roinn ar chuid de na ceisteanna nach bhfuil freagartha chomh luath agus is féidir chomh maith céanna. Tá sé iontach le feiceáil go bhfuil tacaíocht láidir anseo, tacaíocht ó dhaoine a bhfuil taithí acu i dtaobh chúrsaí oideachais ach go háirithe. Tá mise ar an gcomhchoiste eile a raibh na finnétithe os a chomhair. Níl aon locht ar an gcomhchoiste sin ach bhí muid ag teacht aige ó cheist na Gaeilge, an straitéis 20 bliain agus mar sin. Tá sé tábhachtach go bhfuil saineolas oideachais curtha os comhair an choiste seo agus go bhfuilimid ag teacht aige ón angle sin. Gabhaim míle buíochas leis na finnétithe arís as ucht an t-am, an dua agus an cas a chur i láthair chomh paiseanta. Tá súil againn go mbeidh siad sa bhaile in am don Nollaig. Sin an ghuí is mó a bheadh againn dóibh. Guím Nollaig shona orthu ar fad.

**Chairman:** Go raibh maith agat. I would like to thank all of our witnesses for their valuable contributions and their time, noting that for some of them attendance here has taken two days out of their schedules, which are particularly busy in Christmas week. There was excellent engagement and it was very interesting and inspiring to learn from the witnesses. I thank the members of the committee for being here. Deputy Ó Cuív made a comment earlier about the members who stayed in the committee room. We have the best committee in this House. All of our members are genuinely very dedicated, and always stay for the full meetings, which as Chair I very much appreciate. It is a genuine pleasure to work with all of them, because we need that engagement and interest. We all look forward to working with Senator Ó Clochartaigh's report. Deputy Byrne has said that he is going to start preparing policy papers as well. That is what it comes down to. If there was any implicit sense in our discussion that officials are not doing their work, it is only fair to note that the officials are only doing what is laid down in policy. Policy has to change in order to provide the support at the level that is needed. Once again, I thank our witnesses very much. I wish everybody a very happy Christmas and new year. We look forward to further discussions in the middle of January 2018. I also thank Mr. Ian Darcy and Mr. Alan Guidon.

The joint committee adjourned at 6.49 p.m. *sine die*.