

# Irish parents avoiding integration

**Paul Keenan**  
*In Dublin*

A LEADING educationalist says he has "concrete evidence" that some Irish Catholic parents are bypassing local primary schools to avoid their children mixing with pupils from ethnic minorities.

Mgr Dan O'Connor, General Secretary of the Catholic Primary School Management As-

sociation has raised his concerns with the Department of Education and has called for a common enrolment policy to stamp out a practice that appears to have grown with Ireland's increased ethnic diversity in recent years.

"In rural towns, parents are bypassing the town school and taking their children to smaller country schools," he said. "This leads to a situation where

we have schools with empty classrooms while other schools nearby are heaving." He added that while it is a limited problem, there is concrete evidence of its existence.

Mgr O'Connor believes that parishes should operate a common enrolment policy where parents are obliged to apply to enrol their child in the nearest primary school.

Such a policy would need to

be approved by the owners as well as the Department of Education.

Mgr O'Connor also criticised the minority of schools that told parents whose first language was not English that schools elsewhere had more appropriate language support services.

Equally, some schools were suggesting to parents of special needs children that they take them elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup>The Economist "The new wars of religion" (Nov 2007)

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