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One segment of the debate on the place of religion in recognised schools in the Republic of Ireland relates to the provision of Article 44.2.4 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* which stipulates that: "Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not … be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school".

For those responsible for the day-to-day management of Catholic schools this issue is likely to present itself, immediately, at least, in almost exclusively practical terms: "What arrangements should I/may I/can I make for this student in this academic year?" In more and more schools, primary and post-primary, the arrangements made will be guided by the provisions of the school policy on religion, religious instruction, religious education and religious worship. In virtually all primary schools, and in many post-primary schools, the resulting arrangement will involve presence without participation. The student will remain with the class; will not be required to take part in any direct way in the actual lesson; and will be permitted to engage in other school-work, often of the student's own choosing and, thus, not infrequently, the completion of some item of homework.

Few principals regard an arrangement along these lines as anything other than *ad hoc*. Fewer regard it as satisfactory. Virtually none regard it as ideal. It is an arrangement made primarily with a view to facilitating the school in its discharge of its duty of care towards the student in question by ensuring s/he is under the supervision of a teacher for the duration of the period of "withdrawal". It is likely, therefore, that Catholic authorities will welcome indications that schools will be required to ensure that students withdrawn from religious instruction and religious worship are actually withdrawn and that they will be taught rather than left more or less to their own academic devices.

As is often the case, there is, however, a "but". As far back as 2015, John Walshe indicated that this development – not to mention any corresponding development arising from the implementation of s. 30(2)(e) of the Education Act of 1998 - "could cost the tax-payer millions". It can, in fact, only work at all if the Minister provides schools with the additional monies to pay for the extra teaching hours this development will inevitably require. This, then, is, in the first place, a test for the Minister. Just how important for him is this right of "withdrawal" and the consequent right – as he himself appears to see it - to be taught the as yet unspecified alternative subject(s) for the duration of any period of withdrawal? If it really matters, he'll fund it and, if its spin rather than substance, he won't!

Those for whom this initiative – and the wider and over-arching project of secularising, and, in effect, de-Catholicising our schools - is a priority are, for the most part, "haves". The "have nots" have other priorities. The homeless parent who must send her child to school from a hotel room, the young refugee in direct provision who is desperate to be educated, those children and vulnerable adults in the sometimes inadequate care of Tusla and/or of the HSE, have, indeed, the constitutional and statutory rights in focus here. It is, though, rather unlikely that it is the vindication of those rights that is their main or their most pressing concern. A society that listened to them would know this. It would prioritise their needs. It would, in fact, really cherish them, treat them now, and treat them better, so that it might – eventually - treat them equally. It would educate them that they might be free. So to do, of course, would be away more costly than sending the Catholic bishops packing. It is, it seems, OK to be liberal and radical - provided we don't antagonise us early risers.