

Changes in the irish education system essay sample

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The Irish education system has experienced dramatic changes in the last few decades. Education plays a major role in Ireland today, with the growing importance of good education credentials to obtain high skills and competitive jobs. We have seen change in the areas of technology, increased marketisation of education, different types of education, Ethnicities, religions role, women's equality, class and so forth. These changes have brought many benefits and enhanced education standards in this country for most, however they have not benefited others as much.

A major turning point in the Irish education system was the introduction of free education into this country. This allowed everyone the right and opportunity to education despite their background or social class. While in the past only the rich could afford to educate their children and very few working class children had the opportunity to continue onto secondary school, if even finish primary school. Education stopped people from moving upwards in an already class divided society. Normally a working class child was only sent to primary school for a few years until they reached a suitable age to start working. However this changed drastically with the introduction of free fees for second level education in 1967 and free third level fees in 1995, in an attempt by the government to create a more skilled and educated work force. These free fees allowed people who previously wouldn't have been able to afford to continue their education to second and third level to do so. Giving young people the chance to get qualifications also allowed them to move up the class ladder. Today in Ireland 52% of secondary school leavers attend some third level institution.

However there is an argument that these free fees only benefit those who can take advantage of them. It is argued that poorer people still can't afford to send their children to post primary institutes and in particular onto third level due to increasing costs such as registration fees, accommodation, food, travel, books and so forth. Therefore it is the rich that benefit most from these free fees. For instance since the introduction the numbers attending second level have increased however further inequalities have been reported by third level as those able to make most use of the free fees benefit most (Tovey and Share, 2000). However with the introduction of the points system and increased marketisation of education, those the means to can avail of more educational opportunities such as grinds, private tutors and personal computers, help them obtain better results and get into college. While those not so well off can't afford to take these opportunities.

Recent studies show that only one third of students from unskilled backgrounds received at least two C's in higher level papers in the Leaving Certificate while over three quarters of students from backgrounds of higher professions received at least two C's in higher level papers (Tovey & Share, 2000, Pg. 179). Therefore despite great change in our education system further inequalities still exist.

A significant change has also come about in the role of women in education. Until the late 1980's women's education was near to non-existent. Their primary role was at home and very few attended school at all. Only young boys were sent to school and even when girls did attend it was usually only for a few years and boys always got most of the attention from teachers. It

was only in the late 1980's during the women's revolution, when the liberal feminists campaign for equal opportunities and rights in education that women's education started to change (Tovey and Share, 2000). At first women's education was a lot different to now, Rosemary Deam demonstrated that in the past women's education largely prepared them for a family (Macionis and Plummer, 2002, Pg. 486) and subjects were a lot more sexist with only home economics for girls for instance and woodwork for boys.

However a major transformation took place during the 1990's when women became a lot more focused on their education and careers rather than having families. Nowadays women tend to be very education orientated, statistically more so than boys. For instance girls tend to achieve far better leaving Certificate results than boys now and higher percentages of girls tend to go onto third level education than boys, with girls forming the majority in many universities in Ireland today. It is interesting to note that less than 100 years ago Trinity College in Dublin let in its first female student and today females form 64% of the student population attending Trinity. These statistics are great for females however worrying for young males.

Many reasons have been put forward to explain these trends, the so called "lads culture" where it is seen as uncool not macho for boys to study and do well academically is a major factor for explaining underachievement among young males. Despite radical change all is not equal for women in education still, for example bright young males tend to get more attention in classes

than young females, men still tend to get the best jobs and to be first in line for promotions in their careers. For example women still earn less than their male counterparts in the education profession (Macionis and Plummer, 2002, Pg. 500). Hence women still have a bit to go to have equal opportunities in education.

Until the mid 1990's the church has a major influence over education in Ireland. The majority of teachers in Ireland were either priests or nuns. Primary schools were also parish funded. This started to change during the late 1970's with the introduction of inter-denominational schools and gael scoils. During the period from 1986 to 1997 there were 72 new national schools built in Ireland, of these 72 new schools 52 were gael scoils, 13 were inter-denominational, 1 was Muslim and only 2 were catholic schools (Irish Times, 21 September 1999). Another major factor for the decrease of the Catholic Church's influence over primary schools was that in 1999 primary schools were no longer parish funded but instead were state funded (Tovey and Share, 2000). The Catholic Church also had a major influence over secondary schools in Ireland. The majority of secondary schools in the country being run by the Mercy Sister or the Christian Brothers and they were normally boarding schools.

This all started to change during the 1990's, firstly with the introduction of vocational and secondary schools and the community and comprehensive school also. Today in Ireland the Catholic Church has very little influence over education. There have been many reasons given to explain this. The number of priests and nuns in the country has declined, not to mention to

increase in the number of serious assault allegations of young children by priests, during the period when the church ran schools, has led to a lack of trust in the church. Also people don't seem to have as much faith as in the past and therefore tend not to be as influenced by the Catholic Church. Finally Ireland today is a modern international society, with people of different races and religion, this has led to an increase in multi-denominational schools being opened across the country and left little room for schools run solely by the catholic church. This has benefited teachers, people of different races and religions living in Ireland, businesses or investors who invest in schools and the government. Although the same can't be said for priests or nuns and Christian Brothers Schools or Mercy Convents who have experienced rapid decline in the number of students attending them.

The growth of the importance of education in Ireland over the past few years has been astonishing. Ireland has been transformed from a small farming island, where only a tiny minority of elite or educated to within a few hundred years of having one of the highest standards of education in Europe, a problem of over-schooling and people being over qualified for jobs. Whatever arguments have been made against these changes in Irish education, for instance the disadvantaged being kept disadvantaged and shortage of low skilled workers for an increasing number of low skilled jobs. The importance of continued development and change in education is essential to further our knowledge and skill. We can only strive to create equality in all

areas of education in the midst of this development, while education's role in our future cannot be underestimated.

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