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USE OF SCHOOL PREMISES FOR POLITICAL EVENTS – ADVICE

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<p>Audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools; • Education Authority; • Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; • Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Schools; • Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; • Governing Bodies Association. • Controlled Schools’ Support Council <p>Summary of Contents:</p> <p>This circular sets out for the attention of Boards of Governors and Principals the legal position regarding the use of school premises for political events.</p> <p>Enquiries: Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to:</p> <p>Jenny Jackson School Governance Team Department of Education Rathgael House Rathgill 43 Balloo Road BANGOR BT19 7PR</p>	<p>Governor Awareness: Essential</p> <p>Status of Contents: Information for schools</p> <p>Related Documents: Circular letter of 14 May 2009 DE Circular 2013/04 DE Circular 2014/09 DE Circular 2015/09 DE Circular 2016/02</p> <p>Superseded Documents:</p> <p>Expiry Date: none</p> <p>DENI website: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/ Tel: 028 9127 9927 Fax: 028 9127 9450 E-mail: Jenny.jackson@education-ni.gov.uk</p>
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1. School Boards of Governors and school principals should note the regulations and procedures that govern the use of school premises for political events. School authorities will be expected to adhere to this advice, especially in the run up to the forthcoming NI Assembly election.
2. Regulation 6 of the Primary Schools: General Regulations (NI) 1973 and regulation 7 of the Secondary Schools (Grant Conditions) Regulations (NI) 1973 which apply to grant-aided schools state that:

“A school shall not be used for political meetings, the transaction of any political business or for any purpose connected directly or indirectly with Parliamentary, Assembly or Local Government elections except as polling booths on the requisition of the officer responsible in accordance with the statutes governing such elections.”

3. This is the current legal position which prohibits the holding of political meetings in a grant-aided school, including meetings which could be regarded as aimed at canvassing for votes for any particular political party or any particular political party election candidate. The only exception permitted is the use of schools as polling booths.
4. This advice is not intended to interfere with the practice of schools to invite politicians to address events related to the school curriculum and pupils’ personal learning and development as young citizens. This applies particularly to sixth form pupils. However, there is a distinction to be made between events which are aimed at the learning and development of young people and those that might be seen to be electioneering activity through canvassing young people as future voters. School authorities should therefore ensure that such events adhere to the regulations governing the use of schools for political meetings.

Liam Barr

LIAM BARR
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