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Dear Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Governors,

Appeal for the suspension of academic selection

At the beginning of April I wrote to express my gratitude and admiration for all that you, in our school communities, are doing during this time of crisis. I reiterate those words today and thank you once more for your encouraging outreach to pupils, their parents and their families.

These are extremely difficult times for all of us. Many families have been struggling to cope with lockdown, with financial responsibilities and with concerns about elderly or sick relatives. There is apprehension about what the future will bring.

In this context, I have become aware of the anxiety that is already building over the prospect of Primary Seven Transfer Tests in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent weeks parents and teachers have spoken to me of their disquiet and about the uncertainty that is already upsetting some children.

I know that teachers have been providing helpful study packs and online resources to assist with home schooling. Parents are doing their best to respond, while juggling work and home commitments, and in some cases overseeing learning for several children at once. Some pupils are responding well; others are struggling, without ready access to technology or the one-to-one assistance of their teachers. A school principal observed to me that he anticipates educational disadvantage will be exacerbated given this year's special circumstances.

Thinking ahead to September, and the likelihood of children returning to school in phases, I expect that you will be facing huge resource challenges. Pupils may require additional personal and emotional support with coming back to school after such a long and stressful break from the classroom.

With all this in mind, and in the best interests of our children and schools, I appeal to the whole educational community in the Archdiocese of Armagh to support a suspension of the use of academic selection for entrance to post-primary schools in September 2021. I urge the Boards of Governors of our Grammar Schools to publish admissions criteria which do not rely upon the use of Transfer Tests carried out under such uncertain and challenging circumstances.

Our Catholic schools rightly take pride in a caring ethos which places Christ, and the well-being of our children, at the centre of everything that we do. In making this appeal for a suspension of the use of academic selection in the coming year, I have no desire to simply re-open the arguments for, and against, the Transfer Tests. I make this call from my heart on behalf of the current Primary Six children, their families and all our school communities.

I pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you make decisions about this sensitive and complex issue.

With every blessing and good wish,

Yours sincerely,

+ Eamon Martin

Eamon Martin
Archbishop of Armagh