

‘Sending gossoons to be made oul’ mollies of’: Rule 127(b) and the feminisation of teaching in Ireland

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This article examines a decision known as Rule 127(b), taken in 1905 by the National Commissioners for Education in Ireland. The rule raised concerns about the displacement of male teachers and their replacement with poorly paid and sometimes untrained females. It appeared to condone the sexual division of labour with women teaching in infant schools and is regarded as having hastened the feminisation of the teaching profession in Ireland. Through the study of contemporaneous sources, this article considers whether Rule 127(b) contributed to the supplanting of male teachers by female teachers and focuses specifically on the reaction of the members of the teaching profession to the rule.

The revised programme for national schools that was implemented in 1900 fundamentally altered the nature of primary education in Ireland. It embraced many of the curricular recommendations of the Belmore report of 1898 and featured a new emphasis on kindergarten education and enlightened teaching methods. Most critically, the programme was based on the principle that school should be an agreeable and benevolent environment for children, especially for those in the infant classes. The image visualized by these reforms was one of pleasant and bright classrooms, happy and interested children, and caring and intelligent teachers. Certainly, the new programme did have some considerable success, as Coolahan (1981) suggests, particularly in the area of introducing new subjects such as object lessons, singing, drawing and physical education. Nonetheless, funding problems dogged the new reform measures from the start, particularly in the area of buildings and equipment, and O’Connell (1968) maintains that the first twenty years of the new century were ‘lean and frustrating’ ones in terms of remuneration for national teachers. While the reforms were worthy, the parsimonious nature of the Treasury and the disjointed structure of the Irish school system meant that the implementation of reform did not always follow a clear path and on many occasions caused conflict (Coolahan, 1981). This discord was clearly evident in the dispute that emerged in 1905 over Rule 127(b).

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Rule 127(b) was imposed on the national schools of Ireland in 1905 by the Commissioners of National Education. It stated:

Boys under eight years of age are ineligible for enrolment in a boys' school where there is not an assistant mistress unless there is no suitable school under a mistress available in the locality. (*Seventy-first report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland: Rules and Regulations of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, Appendix K, 1905, p. 141*)¹

The rule caused controversy and consternation among teachers and their union, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), among principals and managers and among the bishops of the Catholic Church. All had their own reasons for opposing the rule and this led the commissioners to defend it robustly. The rule, while slightly amended, was not repealed as hoped for by the objectors. One of the fundamental objections to the rule was the accusation that male teachers would be ousted from their place within the teaching profession and would be supplanted by female teachers. Using primary source material from reports and minutes of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland and contemporary writings from the *Irish School Weekly* and the *Irish School Monthly*,² this article will attempt to decipher whether this indeed was the case, focusing specifically on the reaction of the members of the teaching profession to the rule.

The object of this rule, according to the memorandum of the chief inspectors, was 'the improved training of infants'. Amalgamation of small single-sex boys' and girls' schools would allow for more 'efficient' training and would allow for infant boys to be placed in the charge of mistresses who were their 'most suitable instructors' (*Minutes of the proceedings of the Commissioners of National Education relating to Rule 127(b) of their code of regulations, 1905, p. 9*). The belief that women were more suitable than men for teaching infants was reiterated again and again by the inspectors in their memoranda. A woman was 'more likely to have the sympathy and patience' needed by 'children of very tender years (boys as well as girls)' and would be 'better looked after by the average mistress rather than the average master' (*Minutes, 1905, p. 10*). This patience and sympathy was not only an 'indispensable pre-requisite for any successful teaching of infants' but it was, according to Mr Stronge, senior inspector, who was quoting from the Dale report,³ 'natural to even an unskilled woman teacher'. It was 'incontestable', he believed, that 'a man both by temperament and training was unfitted to teach infants' (*Minutes, 1905, p. 12*).

Long before the implementation of the rule and indeed before the revised programme of 1900 was introduced, the inspectors had drawn attention to what they termed the 'defective . . . and unsatisfactory . . . training of infants, especially in boys' schools' (*Seventy-first report, 1905, p. 10*). The infant, according to Inspector Brown in his general report, was 'valued solely for his effect on the average attendance. He has a long standing claim for better treatment' (*Seventy-second report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland: General Report on Clonmel circuit, 1906, p. 102*). Not only was kindergarten 'rarely taught', but little attention was paid to training boys in 'good habits'. In fact, little attention was paid to the infants at all

according to the inspectors and some of the core requirements of the infant classes were not being followed simply because masters were not interested in such young children. Indeed, they were physically incapable in some instances of teaching the infants, especially in the case of singing: 'a man's voice being a very unsuitable pattern for small boys' (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 10). It was, according to Mr McElwaine, the inspector in charge of the Ballinasloe circuit in 1905,

a mistake to think that anyone could teach infants ... a high authority has said that women are the natural guardians of young children and there is no doubt that infants are better cared for by schoolmistresses than by schoolmasters. The former understand them better, are more sympathetic and are in closer touch with them. (*Seventy-second report*, 1906, p. 39)

These sentiments both echoed and were informed by the Mosley commission on American schools.⁴ According to the members of this commission, women had 'captured the teaching profession in America from the infant schools upwards' and they were 'led to view somewhat with alarm the growing preponderance of women teachers' (*Irish School Monthly*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 256; Griffin, 1996). The *Irish School Monthly* (*ISM*) qualified this alarm for Irish teachers, however, explaining that, while there might be a great many objections raised to the fact that women constituted 75% of the teaching force in American schools, this was a very different matter 'from the teaching of young boys by women' (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 256). Indeed, quoting from all of the men who served on the commission, the *ISM* stated that 'members of the commission that express themselves as opposed to women monopolising the teaching readily recognise the advantage of young children being trained by individuals of the gentler sex'. Mosley himself is quoted by the *ISM* as coming to a conclusion that 'will find sympathy with most practical educationalists of the present day':

Personally, I should favour the employment of female teachers for both boys and girls up to the age of, say, twelve; for the reason (as it appears to me) the woman claims the sympathy of children in younger years, and understands the working of their minds, in a way and to an extent that no man can. Beyond this point, however I am in favour of turning the pupils over to men. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 256)

It seems clear, therefore, that there were no significant objections to the employment of women teachers in infant schools. The *ISM* believed in fact that not only was it right and proper for infants to be taught by women—'It is simply beyond question that infant children of either sex are better in the charge of their mothers than their fathers—of female rather than male teachers'—but that it had been happening in Irish schools for some time:

In 400 infant schools, 250 girls' schools taught by lay teachers, 240 convent schools and 3,800 mixed schools, boys are now being taught by women only. If it was wrong, why did not those who now protest against it raise their voices long ago? They did not raise their voices because they knew it was not wrong but right. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, pp. 264–266)

It appeared therefore that all who ‘understood education’ were of the opinion that women were suited to teaching infants. Where they disagreed was on the impact this rule would have on the teaching careers of men.

So what was the basis for the objections to this rule? The *ISM* objected to the rule on three counts: the manner in which it was promulgated without notice or consultation; the impact it would have on the careers and prospects of current and future men teachers; and the fact that it was a Treasury-inspired rule that placed education, and Irish education at that, at the mercy of the British Treasury.

According to the *ISM*, the manner in which the rule was introduced was akin to a ‘Rescript or a Manifesto discussed by the Autocracy of Russia. Just so is a Ukase issued. But we never thought to find that twenty grand dukes were sitting fortnightly in Tyrone House’ (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 267). No discussion was entered into with the teachers or managers of the schools or with the parents of the pupils. Not even ‘the arguments pro and con—not an ounce of the evidence on which the arguments were founded’ were divulged and the rule might not have been discovered for months but for the ‘gentlemen of the press’ who brought it to the teachers’ attention. ‘Here’, stated the *ISM*, ‘is a new law, intimately affecting the education of the whole nation, issued casually as a Rule four lines long in a book containing two hundred other rules’. Although the *ISM* suggested that the logical and ‘statesmanlike’ reaction to this system of administering education in Ireland would have been to agitate against the ‘autocracy which is all wrong’, it accepted that failure would be the likely outcome. The alternative was to demand the withdrawal of the rule. Interestingly, it was at this juncture that the *ISM* admitted that the rule itself was not really the issue but that its impact on teachers was the core of the problem: ‘we are honestly of the opinion that the Rule is a good one, provided only that it does not deprive teachers of any portion of their means of living’. To this end, a persistent agitation would have to be set in train by teachers, managers, press and parliament ‘since agitation after the event instead of sane discussion before it seems to be the proper proceeding in this country’ (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 267). This agitation, according to the *ISM*, would have as its focus the plight of male teachers under the rule.

The *ISM* calculated that over 300 men would lose employment, due to the loss of assistantships in boys’ schools, if the rule was to be enforced in the three to four years following 1905. It also calculated that male principals would lose their chances of increments and grade promotion as the average attendances in smaller boys’ schools would drop from 70–100 pupils to below 70, and from 50–64 to below 50. This would mean that there would only be about 200 boys’ schools left in the country in which a male principal could reach the highest promotion—first division of first grade.⁵ The *ISM* considered this fact to be the most heinous of the effects of the rule:

This is a bad look-out for the 3,000 male teachers employed in Boys’ schools. We consider the de-gradation of the Boys’ schools under the action of the new Rule as a matter of even greater importance from the national point of view than the loss of the assistants. It is a permanent loss, and will grievously effect [*sic*] the whole profession. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 265)

This de-gradation represented a loss of promotional opportunities for men within the teaching profession. It was not the only loss, however. The amount of capitation⁶ to be divided in each boy's school would be diminished and in over 200 schools where the average attendance would fall below 60, the one remaining male assistant would lose all claims to capitation. Thus the teachers in boys' schools would end up 'collectively losing many thousands of pounds a year, and this loss, like the loss due to the de-gradation of the schools will be permanent, and will affect the whole nation as well as the individuals who lose' (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 265).

All of these changes would happen at the expense of male teachers only. The *ISM* recognised that there might be an improvement in female teachers' positions and incomes but did not want this to happen 'by sacrificing the male teachers . . . the women need all that they can get, but that it should not be taken out of the men's pockets' (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 265). This would be most obvious in the case of the capitation question:

What will happen is that a certain number of thousands of pounds will be taken from the male teachers and handed over to the females. Robbing Peter to pay—Maria! We congratulate Maria on her luck; but at the same time we want to help in the fight for common justice for Peter. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 268)

The issue was therefore clear for the *ISM*. If this rule was accepted as it stood, it would deprive male teachers of a portion of their means of living. It could not be countenanced on this basis. If it was to be acceptable to the teaching profession the rule would have to be modified in the interests of 'safeguarding the Male assistants' (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 267). To this end, the *ISM* suggested two possible changes to the rule: abolition terms should be offered to the male assistants whose positions were abolished in the form of a gratuity or a greatly increased pension, and the regulations concerning grade promotion and increments should be altered to take into account the new circumstances pertaining to the conditions of promotion because of the rule. Interestingly, these new alterations should only apply to male teachers, according to the *ISM*:

It would be reasonable to demand, not merely the lowering of the number of pupils in average attendance required for the recognition in the different grades for male teachers but the increase in amount and frequency of their increments. Also, considering the very small number of large Boys' schools that will remain, a very reasonable demand would be for the formation of a new Grade with a maximum salary considerably higher than the highest now available. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 268)

While these solutions were unlikely to be met if, indeed, the Treasury was trying to save money, they are indicative of a mindset and attitude that was prevalent at the time, not least among teachers and their representatives. Income was clearly linked to position in society and ultimately to the respect due to the profession:

The average salary of a national teacher according to the latest returns is less than £100 a year, while a salary of £56 and £44 for men and women respectively is the new scale adopted since 1st April 1900 . . . What respect can a teacher with a salary of £1 a week or less hope to get? (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 355)

This was particularly problematical for male teachers who, in the opinion of the *ISM*, ought to be in a position to:

dress decently, and to live in a seven or eight-roomed house comfortably furnished. A library of a couple of hundred good books ought to be in his possession and should a friend call, becoming hospitality should await him. There should be no difficulty in the teacher's having his life insured, and in his being able to afford an annual holiday, as well as a subscription occasionally to a worthy object. After a time too he ought to have something to his credit in the bank. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 356)

However, with their already paltry salaries, teachers did not seem able to command the respect they were due in society. With the implementation of Rule 127(b), salaries would be reduced, promotion stifled and jobs lost.

The rules, which were published in the commissioners report for 1904 and which included the controversial Rule 127(b), also included a rule much quoted by the commissioners as proof of their long-abiding interest in, and desire to improve, infant teaching in boys' schools; this was Rule 86. The four sections of Rule 86 clearly outlined the inspectors' opinion that women were the best and most suitable teachers of infants. It stated that, in mixed schools under a master, a mistress should be appointed and, where the attendance did not warrant the hiring of an assistant, a manual instructress should be recognized. In mixed schools where the attendance was less than 35, the teacher should be a woman. Most significantly, a mistress could be appointed in a boys' school to assist in teaching the junior standards (*Seventy-first report, Appendix K, Rules 86 and 87*, 1905, p. 127). This rule clearly signified that no schools were closed to women teachers albeit in the capacity of an assistant teacher who was hired to teach junior classes. In fact, Rule 87(b) stated that, while mistresses could not be recognised as principals of boys' schools generally, they could become principals if the school was attended by infants only. This rule, however, which was not quoted by the inspectors at all, had a section (a) and did not allow for the appointment of men in any girls' school or indeed in any mixed school where the principal was a woman:

87(a) a master, whether principal or assistant, is not recognised in a girls' school; nor is an assistant master recognised in any school under a mistress. (*Seventy-first report, Appendix K, Rule 87*, 1905, p. 127)

Certainly this rule echoed the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of society at that time in that women were subordinate to men. But the effect of the rule when taken in conjunction with rules 86 and 127(b) was to limit the possibilities for men to become assistants in mixed schools and to lessen their chances of being appointed as assistants in boys' schools. The combined effect of these rules, therefore, would seem to lend weight and credibility to the concerns expressed in the *ISM* about the loss of opportunity for male teachers. In fact, the commissioners' response to the objections raised by teachers and managers highlights the very dangers to male assistants posed by the combination of the rules. Rule 127(b) was amended to allow schools that would lose an assistant under the rule to retain him by way of 'special permission'. However, if the numbers in the school consequently warranted an assistant, a

mistress would be appointed under Rule 86(d), the special permission would be withdrawn and the male assistant rendered ineligible for appointment (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 13).

This was occurring at a time when the inspectors acknowledged that the number of male candidates for teaching was decreasing. This is not immediately apparent by looking at the numbers of students in training in this period as the numbers of King's scholars for which the training colleges were licensed was fixed by the commissioners and the colleges were not permitted to accept any increase beyond these numbers. In 1904, the training colleges were licensed to train 495 men and 650 women in total (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 47). If we look, however, at the numbers of candidates who applied to the training colleges in that same year, it is clear that there were significantly more women applying than there were places in the colleges whereas the same was not true of men. In 1904, 411 male candidates applied for the two-year teacher-training course and 213 (52%) were admitted. In the same year, 1195 female candidates applied and 339 (28%) were admitted to the colleges. In 1905, 438 men applied and 215 (49%) were admitted; 1186 women applied and 275 (23%) were admitted; in 1909, 773 men applied and 258 (33%) were admitted; 2070 women applied and 308 were admitted (15%) (*Seventy-second report*, 1906, p. 47; *Seventy-sixth report*, 1910, p. 35). These figures appear to suggest that there was more interest among women in teaching even before the advent of Rule 127(b) than there was among men. The inspectors themselves stated in their general report on the training colleges in 1903–4 that in all colleges for men a lower standard of proficiency in the successful candidates had to be accepted and that this led to 'striking inferiority of the men . . . compared with the women' in exam results at the end of the first year's training. In that year (1904), 88% of women were placed in first or second class whereas 63% of men had the same results (*Seventy-first report: General report on the Training Colleges 1903–4*, 1905, p. 6). The judgement of the inspectors is clear. Fewer men were applying for teacher training than women and those who were were of inferior calibre and quality than the women candidates.

There were more men enrolled in training than women until 1900. That year a new college, Mary Immaculate College Limerick, opened for women, and was licensed for 100 students. Each year until 1910, however, there were between 135 and 230 more women in training than men (*Sixty-seventh report*, 1901, p. 36; *Seventy-sixth report*, 1910, p. 37). Even in Marlborough Street Training College in Dublin, which was under the direct control of the commissioners, the number of men and women 'used to be nearly equal, but latterly the women are much more numerous, and a difficulty has been experienced in keeping up the supply of masters' (*Seventy-first report: General report on the Training Colleges 1903–4*, 1905, p. 8). The commissioners commented on these general trends in 1904:

We have arrived at the conclusion that the decrease in recent years in the number of male candidates for entrance to the Training Colleges is largely attributable to the uncertainty regarding the prospects of young teachers as compared with those enjoyed by teachers who were in our service before 1900. (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 19)

The Commissioners ‘unanimously adopted’ eight resolutions at their meeting of 19 July 1904 which aimed to ensure ‘a more rapid promotion for an efficient teacher and make the salaries of principals more closely correspond with the responsibility of duties they have to discharge’. These schemes, they believed, would make teaching more attractive as a profession, allow progression to the highest salary more swiftly than the 36 years of satisfactory service previously required and would remove this ‘impression, although largely based upon a misconception of our powers [which] has operated prejudicially upon the supply of candidates for the Training Colleges’ (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, pp. 19–20). In this way, merit would be clearly rewarded and, they hoped, men of quality would be attracted to a profession which allowed them status and a salary commensurate with that status.

And yet the commissioners did not control the purse strings. Far from controlling them, the *ISM* concluded that the commissioners were being used as mere pawns in implementing a rule that would benefit the British Treasury:

Nineteen Irish gentlemen, receiving no pay and owning no authority, including in their number two Bishops, four Judges, one Peer, one Lord and two Baronets, have entered into a vile and nefarious conspiracy to deprive Ireland of education. And they have done this, it seems to be universally accepted, merely to please certain clerks of the British Treasury. (*ISM*, 1905, vol. 5, p. 268)

The commissioners contested this opinion strenuously. Far from being a ‘secretly concocted rule’ made at the behest of the penny-pinching Treasury, Rule 127(b) in their opinion gave educational advantages to schools that managers, inspectors and teachers had been recommending for 30 years. It allowed for the establishment of infant schools and the giving to boys in their earlier years the advantage of being trained and instructed by women as had been the ‘privilege’ of those boys enrolled in girls’ schools and in convent schools. It allowed also for the amalgamation of small schools with a single teacher which were ‘relatively inefficient’, especially in the south of Ireland where the fact of there being separate departments for boys and girls was the chief cause of the existence of so many small schools and ‘which are, as a rule, bad schools’ (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, pp. 9–18). Most significantly of all, these advantages proved, according to the commissioners, that the Treasury ‘have had nothing whatever to do with the rule in its inception and discussion’. Although they admitted that it was true that ‘the strict application of this rule might lower the incomes of the principals of small boys’ schools by preventing their promotion in grade and by reducing their capitation grant’, they countered this admission by stating that, if the boys’ school amalgamated with the girls’ school, the master would ‘if efficient’ be able to rise in grade because of the greater pupil numbers. The mistress would also retain her principal’s salary ‘by special permission of the Treasury’ even though she would now be merely an assistant (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 12). This was a very positive development, according to Mr McElwaine, inspector on the Ballinasloe Circuit, as the only argument that could be construed against the principal of a girls’ school becoming an assistant in a mixed one was a ‘sentimental one of loss of dignity’ and this would be more than compensated for by

the educational advantages to the pupils and ‘by the easier and less harassing work of being responsible for the half instead of the whole of the school’ (*Seventy-second report*, 1906, p. 31).

Setting aside the total lack of empathy with, or sympathy for, women principals who would in effect be demoted by amalgamation as, in keeping with Rule 87, all amalgamated boys’ and girls’ schools had to have male principals, the attitude of the commissioners and inspectors to women’s place within the teaching profession is striking. But at least the inspectors and commissioners were the instigators of the rule and may have felt bound to defend it. The *Irish School Weekly (ISW)* roundly condemned the rule and also showed a remarkable disdain for the female teachers in its ranks. Describing the rule as forcing ‘infant boys to leave the Irish masters after next Fool’s Day, and be instructed by low-paid poor females’ it compared women teachers to ‘Chinese cheap labour at the Rand’ (*ISW*, 1905, 4 March). Not only were female teachers dismissed as ‘cheap labour . . . to keep the infants quiet’ (*ISW*, 1905, 4 March) but they were regarded as poor quality substitutes:

Hence we have the employment of male teachers discouraged and recommendations for filling their places by cheap and inefficient female teachers. (*ISW*, 1905, 18 March)

The publication went so far as to publish a poem about the ‘supplanting of the male by the female’ and the fact that female teachers were taking their livelihood:

Be strong to bear, ye ‘males’!
 Just merely grin.
 Ladies your schools will care
 For much less ‘tin’.
 Workhouses everywhere
 Will take ye in. (*ISW*, 1905, 18 March)

Of course it had a point. Women were paid less than men. In 1905, the largest category of male principals (2353) and assistants (1502) received a rate of salary of £56–£86 inclusive. The largest categories of female principals (2125) and assistants (3070) received £44–£72 inclusive (Table 1). By 1909, the two largest categories of male principals were receiving £90–£100 (664) and £120–£130 (798) and the two

Table 1. Salaries from state sources alone (exclusive of the annual capitation grant) of the principal and assistant teachers in the service, on 31 December 1905 (*Seventy-second report*, 1906, p. 46)

Rate of salary	Male principals	Male assistants	Rate of salary	Female principals	Female assistants
Under £56	22	—	Under £44	6	—
£56–£86 incl	2353	1171	£44–£72 incl	2125	3070
£87–£116 incl	1502	14	£73–£95 incl	969	26
£117–£138 incl	432	14	£97–£113 incl	294	15
£139–£174 incl	192	20	£114–£140 incl	153	8
£175 and above	82	—	£141 and above	59	—
Total	4583	1219	Total	3606	3119

largest categories of female principals, £50–£60 (516) and £70–£80 (545). The majority of male principals (76%) were receiving rates of income ranging from £70 to £130 whereas the majority of female principals (79%) were receiving rates of income ranging from £50 to £110. Of male assistants, 98% received rates of income ranging from £60 to £110 while 98% of female assistants received rates of income ranging from £50 to £90 (Table 2). It was accepted that, even though the women did the same work as men in the schools, they were entitled to between £10 and £20 less per annum. This discrepancy was highlighted very clearly in the *ISW* in April 1905:

The glaring injustice of this difference of treatment is best shown in the case of mixed schools. Take that of one with an average of 40. If a man is employed he is paid £56. There is with him a manual instructress at a salary of £24: total £80 per annum. Now if a lady teacher is employed she is supposed to do the work of both and is paid not £80, not £56 but the mean pittance of £11 every three months [£44]. One asks are her aristocratic employers ashamed to seriously offer such a dole and call it a salary? . . . £2 are expended in the purchase of requisites and this sum may be considered as lost to her. If board is reckoned as costing six or seven pounds during the quarter, wherein does her payment for professional services come in? It is really hard to consider such treatment in patience. When Rule 127(b) is repealed, it is the teachers' manifest duty, in conjunction with the Gaelic League, to denounce this starvation policy from every platform in the country. (*ISW*, 1905, 8 April)

Table 2. Rates of income from state sources of teachers in the service on 31 December 1909. Exclusive of grants for special subjects and fees for evening school instruction. (*Seventy-sixth report*, 1910, p. 34)

Rate of income	Male principals	Male assistants	Female principals	Female assistants
Under £50	2	—	11	—
£50 and under £60	21	—	516	1335
£60 and under £70	159	328	454	634
£70 and under £80	494	390	545	807
£80 and under £90	583	195	444	800
£90 and under £100	664	202	292	21
£100 and under £110	525	101	486	15
£110 and under £120	350	3	182	4
£120 and under £130	798	1	182	11
£130 and under £140	137	4	157	7
£140 and under £150	166	5	50	1
£150 and under £160	247	8	38	3
£160 and under £170	89	3	81	—
£170 and under £180	40	4	19	—
£180 and under £190	36	2	6	—
£190 and under £200	41	—	2	—
£200 and under £225	109	—	—	—
£225 and under £250	18	—	3	—
£250 and under £300	8	—	—	—
£300 and above	2	—	—	—
Total	4489	1246	3486	3638

This apparent sympathy for the female teachers and their unequal rates of pay is somewhat surprising given that the *ISW* had criticised the female teachers as cheap and inefficient. Indeed, had this rule not highlighted the money supposedly being saved by the Treasury, would the salary differential have been an issue for the Teachers' Union at all (Chuinneagáin, 1995, 1998)? Even the *ISW* maintained that had there been equal pay for equal work, 'if it had been strongly and firmly demanded and obtained, I think we should never have been honoured with the famous Rule 127(b)' (*ISW*, 1905, 8 April). Thus it appears that the *ISW* sought to redress the injustice of different pay rates for women simply because it was the differences in these very pay rates that allowed the implementation of Rule 127(b) which the *ISW* wanted repealed.

According to the commissioners, there would be no benefit to the Treasury from the rule. In fact, they maintained that initially at least there would be an increased cost as both principals of amalgamated schools would retain their salaries and the male principal would increase his because of the greater numbers. Some senior schools might also require a manual instructress to assist the male in teaching needlework, laundry and singing and this too would increase expenditure (*Minutes: Memorandum of Chief Inspectors*, 1905, p. 10). Mr Stronge's memorandum states categorically that considerations of expenditure had nothing to do with the passing of the rule and that, if it had been a factor, the rule would never have been passed:

A much simpler and less expensive proceeding would have been not to interfere with the existing small double schools until the steady decline in average attendance which is occurring in all parts of the country had reached such a minimum as to enable the Commissioners to strike one of the two schools off the roll. In that event, the teacher might have had to retire without a pension, and could only be succeeded by a manual instructress. (*Minutes: Memorandum of Chief Inspectors*, 1905, p. 9)

It would be foolish, however, to discount an economic motive in the passing of the rule. In an extract from a Treasury letter of 14 March 1905 to the Under Secretary entitled 'superfluous schools', it is evident that the Lords of the Treasury had requested the commissioners to implement reforms and to reduce the numbers of separate schools for boys and girls on foot of the Dale report. Citing the 'gross extravagance and the great educational disadvantages resulting from the present over-subdivision', they clearly expected to make savings through amalgamation. They agreed to allow the female principal of an amalgamated school to retain her salary but stipulated that the 'arrangement would be personal to the existing teachers' and stated that this personal arrangement would 'postpone for some time the realization of any considerable saving by amalgamation.' In the meantime, the Lords of the Treasury made it clear to the commissioners that they would not be able to 'sanction expenditure on any new services put forward on the ground of anticipated savings to be effected by amalgamation, but must await the actual realization of such savings' (*Minutes: Memorandum of Chief Inspectors*, 1905, pp. 15–16). This letter would suggest that, in spite of the protests of the commissioners that cost was not a factor in the passing of the rule, both they and the Treasury expected the amalgamation of 'inefficient' double schools to result from

the passing of the rule and allow an eventual saving of money by replacing the more expensive male teachers with female assistants. It appeared that the commissioners were in fact counting on these savings and may even have suggested a possible use for the money, as is implied in the Treasury's reply. There is no doubt that the commissioners had much use for money; even if new infant departments were to be created, small desks would have to be purchased so that the infants were not standing at large ones and falling asleep with their chins at the level of the desk as before. But the Treasury refused even to provide resources for the knocking of walls between the double schools to effect amalgamation and thus it appears that the possibility of savings made by the rule, whether realised or not, were not pumped back into improving the Irish education system as the commissioners might have anticipated (*Seventy-second report*, 1906, p. 17).

One of the key savings and economies brought about by this rule was that of the employment of manual instructresses or junior assistant mistresses (JAMs) as they came to be called. Manual instructresses were appointed for the first time in 1900 'to give instruction not only in Needlework, but also in Kindergarten, Hand-and-Eye training and Object lessons' and new appointments were in schools where there were no female teachers and where the average attendance did not warrant the appointment of an assistant teacher. As this new 'class of teacher' was untrained, her salary was small. Where the average attendance of girls was less than 20, she was paid £1 capitation grant for each girl in average attendance. Where the average attendance of girls was more than 20 but less than the number required for an assistant teacher, she was paid a uniform salary of £24 per annum (*Sixty seventh report: Appendix F, New rules and regulations*, 1901, p. 105). In their report for the year 1904 in which they defended Rule 127(b), the commissioners recommended the provision of a manual instructress for small schools (average attendance from 35 to 49) as 'vital to the efficiency of the system' and suggested that it would therefore be 'possible to convert a very large number of single-teacher schools into two-teacher schools in a way that will vastly increase their efficiency' (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 21). The representations to the Treasury 'met with success' and after July 1906 a second teacher, a JAM, was to be employed in every school, mixed or single sex, with an average attendance of between 35 and 50 pupils. In the opinion of the commissioners, the 'services of this new class of teachers will prove very valuable, especially in regard to the care and education of children of very tender years' and they considered it to be 'one of the most important educational reforms introduced into Ireland in recent years.' These JAMs were untrained,⁷ a fact that was acknowledged in the very next sentence by the commissioners themselves as they asked for a means to be provided of giving the JAMs a 'suitable training in kindergarten and object-lessons' (*Seventy-second report*, 1906, p. 20).

But the fact was that all JAMs were women. It appears that, because of their gender, the commissioners believed that this untrained 'new class of teacher' would be suitable to teach kindergarten and the infants. The Treasury appears to have been open to the suggestion as, because of their gender, the JAMs were to be paid less than men and, being untrained, they were to be paid less than trained female assistants. As

early as 1905, 'Beta', writing to the editor of the *ISW*, described the then manual instructresses as 'animated broomsticks' and highlighted the fact that they would be eligible with three years service (having passed the scholarship examination) for appointment as assistants (*ISW*, 1905, 11 March). This was recognised as fact by the inspectors in their general report on the training colleges in 1909 when they stated that 'the extensive promotion of junior assistant mistresses to graded assistantships is also injurious to the prospects of trained teachers' (*Seventy-sixth report: General report on the Training Colleges*, 1910, p. 7). In November 1905, the *ISW* remarked that, while JAMs were the best that was on offer at the time from the commissioners, it was not 'particularly in love with the introduction of unqualified teachers for the infant pupils and junior standards. We have always been of the opinion that the very best teacher in the school should be in charge of the youngest children' (*ISW*, 1905, 18 November). In report after report from the district inspectors in 1909, the issue of the JAMs was remarked upon, usually unfavourably:

The general progress in the proper training of infants is rather disappointing . . . most of the junior assistant mistresses have now had an opportunity of attending an organizer's class, but this short course, though very beneficial, is not sufficient for the attainment of the skill which is required to realise the mental development contemplated by the code in the case of the younger pupils. Hence the teaching of these junior mistresses is still too mechanical—there is too much instruction, too little education.

. . . add to this the junior assistant mistresses are not highly trained in the subject [kindergarten] themselves and in many instances, the teaching is perfectly mechanical and often worthless. (*Seventy sixth report: General report on Enniskillen circuit*, 1910, p. 31)

Too much cannot be expected from those teachers [JAMs], in view of their general want of training, and the meagreness of their salaries. (*Seventy-sixth report: General report on Armagh circuit*, 1910, p. 43)

They were nonetheless useful in keeping infants 'employed' (*Seventy-sixth report: General report on Cork (1) circuit*, 1910, p. 143) and considerably better than a man:

In a considerable number of schools in the section the infants are under the care of a female assistant or a junior assistant mistress. Most of the latter have attended the classes held by the kindergarten organizers, and are making very fair attempts to put into practice the up-to-date methods they have been shown . . . in the schools under the charge of a single teacher, especially a man, the management of the infants is far from satisfactory. (*Seventy-sixth report: General report on Athlone circuit*, 1910, p. 107)

Rule 127(b) was primarily about the amalgamation of small, single-sex schools and the efficiency of the education system in a progressive sense. The commissioners sought to address the issue of the duplication of buildings and staff and to create senior and junior divisions within the schools that would serve the needs of the pupils better. While this may have been at the behest or at least at the request of the Treasury, there had been clear recommendations in previous reports about these issues and these had been crystallised in the Dale report. Yet by December 1909, 62% (5237) of the 8401 schools under the control of the Commissioners were

one-room schools, which militated against the efficient and progressive teaching of infants, especially as the Commissioners had consistently stated that the benefits of amalgamation and of the provision of either an assistant or a JAM would be negated if a separate space was not provided for the teaching of infants (*Seventy-sixth report: General report on Omagh circuit*, 1910, p. 20; *General report on Athlone circuit*, 1910, p. 107). This aspect, therefore, which had been a key motivator for the passing of the rule by the commissioners, had not been realised five years after the implementation of the rule.

Rule 127(b) was promulgated and passed in a patriarchal society. It might, therefore, have been expected to favour men and to be of primary benefit to their lives. The opposite was in fact the case. Fewer opportunities were created for the employment of male assistant teachers with the passing of this rule as long as Rule 87, which prohibited a master serving under a mistress, remained on the books. There was no opportunity for men to become junior assistant masters as these positions were reserved solely for women and offered women an alternative mode of entry into the profession.⁸ The commissioners' recommendation that schools with an average attendance of less than 35 should have women teachers (whether it was on the basis of reduced pay benefits or for ideological reasons) further reduced the possibility of male assistants finding employment. The fact that women were paid less than men led to the possibility that savings would be made by employing cheaper female labour and this was capitalised upon by employing the even cheaper, untrained JAMs at a cost to the Treasury of only £24 per annum. Rule 127(b) made this possible, both ideologically and actually, thus closing off an employment avenue for men.

Even though the commissioners continually stressed that male principals would benefit from the rule and that, far from closing opportunities to men, it would in fact increase the possibility of their being promoted to the highest grades with the best salaries, even they had to admit by 1909 that this was not happening. In their seventy-sixth report (1910, p. 11), the commissioners highlighted the fact that a 'serious disability' was being suffered by 'certain highly efficient teachers to whom, owing to the limitation of the numbers in the first grade although fully qualified for promotion, we have been unable to pay the first grade salary'. The Treasury refused to increase the promotional opportunities for these men and even excised the request for bonuses to be paid to principals of large schools from the proposals of the commissioners. While there is no doubt that the commissioners themselves believed that male teachers should be encouraged into the profession with the promise of financial rewards and promotional opportunities, the fact that they did not have the authority to dispense these rewards meant that Rule 127(b) had a negligible effect on this aspect of male teachers' lives.

Rule 127(b) had as an ideological basis the notion that women were better and more sympathetic instructors of young children than men. The *ISW* did question this philosophy briefly:

The man who sympathises with children, and who can keep a class of infants interested and happy and in good humour, is a true teacher. This is his profession, and if he fails to reach this educational standard he is not a teacher, and is consequently unfit to teach children of any age under or over eight. By the way, what was the sex of Froebel? (*ISW*, 1905, 1 April)

However, the majority of commentators accepted this belief as fact. This had a considerable impact on the nature of the profession. Initially, the increase in staff to allow for the separate teaching of infants promised increased employment opportunities for trained female assistants and, coupled with Rule 86, allowed greater scope for the employment of women in mixed or in single-sex girls' or boys' schools. Almost immediately, however, the advantage of being cheaper to hire and having special sympathies with small children worked against the female teachers as JAMs were employed because they were even cheaper to hire than female assistants and because, as women, they supposedly were possessed of the attributes that fitted them to teach infants. Rule 127(b) locked women into the caring and nurturing role that was commonly accepted as their nature in this period. It was suggested by some inspectors that the training colleges should divide their female King's scholars and instigate special classes for training mistresses of infants' schools (*Seventy-second report: General report on Dublin (no. 2) circuit*, 1906, p. 22). Most importantly, Rule 127(b) validated the keeping of women in a subordinate role to men, most particularly as junior teachers in national schools, because of their supposed innate patience with, and sympathy for, small children. This was highlighted very clearly by Mr Connelly, an inspector on the Killarney circuit in 1905, when he stated that 'a man has not the inclination to busy himself with little ones who need emotional rather than intellectual treatment' (*Seventy-second report: General report on Killarney circuit*, 1906, p. 129).

And this is the nub of the feminisation issue. It is true that women were already beginning to outnumber men in the teaching profession and that the number of women candidates applying for training far outnumbered those of men candidates before the introduction of Rule 127(b). But feminisation is not just about the physical replacement of men by women (Wallace, 1996; Perlman & Margo, 2001). It is also about the equation of particular work with female characteristics (Strober & Tyack, 1980; Grumet, 1988). Rule 127(b) asserted that women were more suitable for teaching infants than men. Because women were paid less than men, infant teaching became equated with less valuable teaching. Inspectors could argue that teaching infants was 'emotional' rather than 'intellectual'. This led even in 1905 to comments among the general public that young boys would be feminised if taught by women and that working men should be wary of 'sending [their] gossoons to be made oul' mollies of' (*ISW*, 1905, 4 March). A short sketch published in the *ISW* clearly displayed the classroom as women's space in the aftermath of Rule 127(b):

Paddy (8) – Father read it in the paper that after summer I would have to play with the girls and nurse the babies.

Tommy (8) – Mother is getting my long dress ready again, but I won't wear it; I'll mitch.

Paddy – I'll go with you, away down to the strand to see the men and the boats. (*ISW*, 1905, 1 April)

There were not many professions open to ordinary men in an Ireland that was still a colony of its near neighbour in 1905. Ireland was not an industrial nation that could have provided well-paid alternative employment. But the national school classroom was being defined as women's space as Rule 127(b) embedded the prevailing ideology into the rules and regulations of the Irish education system and consequently barred and blocked this professional avenue to men.

Notes

1. On the eve of the rule being put into practice, there were 13,392 teachers in the service of the Commissioners, 5795 male assistants and principals and 5486 female assistants and principals. The remainder (1051) comprised JAMs, manual instructresses, workmistresses and temporary assistants. Of all male teachers, 80% were principals and 20% were assistants. Of all women teachers 66% were principals and 44% were assistants (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 39; see also Logan, 1997).
2. The *Irish School Weekly* was founded in 1904 as a 'practical journal for practical teachers and a record of the work of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation [INTO].⁷ It cost a penny and was published by the Educational Company of Ireland although its editorial and literary sections were written by members of the INTO. In 1919 the INTO took over full editorial control. The *Irish School Monthly* was founded in 1900 as a 'magazine of practical schoolwork' and was published by Blackie and Son, Dublin. It cost threepence and was edited by Mr. W. G. Lyons, chairman of the Educational Company of Ireland. The *ISM* published monthly accounts of the work of the INTO written by a prominent member of the executive. Publication of the *ISM* ceased in 1906.
3. Dale report, p. 37, point 125. Mr F. H. Dale had been commissioned by the British government to 'inquire and report how typical Irish Elementary Day Schools compared with similarly circumstanced Public Elementary Schools in England as regards Premises, Equipment, Staffing and Instruction; and to what causes differences in economy and efficiency appear to be chiefly due'.
4. Sir Alfred Mosley organised an Educational Commission which visited the United States from October to December 1903 to 'ascertain how far education in the United States is responsible for her industrial progress'.
5. There were three grades, and all teachers appointed after 1 April 1900 were placed on grade three. There were two divisions in first grade. Teachers' grades were determined by inspectors' reports, average attendance numbers and standard numbers. The standard numbers system allowed for a fixed number of teachers in either division of the first grade and no promotion to either grade was possible when that number was reached unless a teacher already in the grade resigned or died. An average attendance of 70 was necessary to reach first division of first grade. Three consecutive 'very good' inspection reports were required for promotion to the first grade (see O'Connell, 1968).
6. The Irish Education Act of 1892 provided for a residual capitation grant to be paid to schools based on the daily average attendance.
7. In the same report the commissioners made much of the fact that 60.3% of teachers in their service on 31 December 1905 were trained.

8. The JAMs comprised less than 1% of the teaching force in 1905. By 1910, they comprised 15% of all teachers in the national schools (*Seventy-first report*, 1905, p. 39; *Seventy-sixth report*, 1910, p. 27).

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