



Church of Ireland
Board of Education (NI)

Date: 5th October 2021

Committee for Education
Room 205, Parliament Buildings,
Ballymiscaw,
Stormont,
Belfast,
BT4 3XX

Dear Ms Treanor,

Ref: Integrated Education Bill

The Church of Ireland Board of Education (Northern Ireland) is chaired by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd John McDowell, and considers all matters regarding education in Northern Ireland. The Board has considered the Integrated Education Bill and wishes to make the following comments.

Overview:

The Church of Ireland Board of Education (NI) is committed to education that is open to all young people. The Church of Ireland has only two schools under its sole governance and both have a policy of welcome and inclusion where all pupils are accepted from all backgrounds.

The Board is fully committed to Shared Education, and Church of Ireland representatives work tirelessly on the Education Authority's Committees to advance this work. Church of Ireland clergy and volunteers sit as governors on a range of Controlled schools, including Integrated schools, and have demonstrated commitment to the ethos of all schools where they are privileged to serve. The Church of Ireland has a representative on the Board of the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) and is wholly supportive of the non-denominational ethos of CSSC to include children and young people from all backgrounds. The Board is supportive of the diversity that already exists in the Controlled sector, with many controlled schools having a significant community mix in their enrolment.

The Church of Ireland is a member of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) representing the interests of Presbyterian, Methodist and Church of Ireland traditions. The TRC is represented at all levels of Area Planning, and is committed to the Minister of Education's policy of finding the best education solution for each area, working closely alongside all other bodies concerned in area planning. The TRC is

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working closely with the Catholic Trustees on the concept of Jointly Managed Church Schools (JMCS). The Board is encouraged by the progress being made in this initiative, and looks forward to working with the Catholic Trustees on a viable project to create such a school.

The Board is committed to open and inclusive high quality education for all children and young people

Integrated Education Bill:

1. We are concerned that this Bill seems to be suggesting designated Integrated schools as the only way forward. We believe in children coming together and learning together within a Christian ethos which is welcoming of all children regardless of their faith or none, their culture, gender, or socio-economic background.
2. We are concerned at the timing of this Bill and how this Bill moving forward could prejudice the Independent Review of Education.
3. At a strategic level Clause 1, as set out, seems to indicate that future education in Northern Ireland will prioritise comprehensive all-ability schools. How will the intention of Clause 1 ensure a mix of socio-economic groups in any new Integrated schools be delivered, given that educational demographics indicate that many children, particularly the socially deprived, live in single religious identity communities?
4. The overall tone of the Bill seems to be based on a couple of questionable assumptions. Firstly, it pays no regard to the current migration that naturally occurs in many of our schools, borne out by the community background data on schools provided on the Department of Education's website.¹ Secondly, there seems to be a clear assumption that in future the only road to integrated education is in a dedicated sector. The fact that Controlled schools are non-denominational schools that are open to all children seems to be ignored. The Bill also assumes that natural integration does not occur, when in reality integration

¹ Table 5: Religion of pupils by school type and management type, 2020/21, Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2020-21



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works best when naturally enabled, in community. We can give examples of this across all sectors.

- 5 The promotion of Integrated education through giving it priority over all other types of education seems to go against the ideal working for an inclusive society. It is unclear how the legislative imperative to promote Integrated education would be balanced by the Department of Education against its other statutory obligations with regard to Shared Education and Irish Medium Education.
- 6 The Bill seems short on practicality given the demographics of Northern Ireland. How will a new Integrated school achieve a reasonable balance of religions in single identity communities?
- 7 The proposals seem to imply that any potential development of existing schools, regardless of the level of integration within them, will be secondary to formal Integrated Schools.
- 8 The requirement to prioritise resources to Integrated schools will be detrimental to existing schools, and indeed could by its nature promote division and not tackle issues such as child poverty but rather Integrated schools will flourish and schools in socially deprived areas which require significant investment will be neglected further. For example, will the Education Authority be required to allocate scarce Minor Works resources firstly to Integrated schools leaving little for existing schools?
- 9 The proposals in Clause 7 seem to be contrary to the Department of Education's Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning guidance.
- 10 Clause 2 sets out the purposes of Integrated education but these are indistinguishable from the purposes that apply to all schools. However, the presumption that all new schools will be Integrated schools regardless of the existence of spare places in other schools (Clause 7), directly contradicts Clause 2.b. which aims to promote the efficient and effective use of resources.
- 11 We would wish to see how the Bill fulfils the requirement of Section 75 and other equality legislation.

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12 We are particularly concerned that there is no mention of faith-based education and how this can be provided. NICIE is very clear that all Integrated schools are based on a Christian ethos. Should this not be included in the Bill?

In conclusion the Board would wish all schools to be inclusive for those of all faiths and none. We welcome any further dialogue with the Education Committee on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Dr Peter Hamill

Secretary to the Church of Ireland Board of Education (NI)

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