

Written Evidence Submitted by

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1. The bill as currently drafted defines “integrated education” without reference to the conferral of such status by the Department of Education.
2. In recent years, a number of schools have developed in Northern Ireland with a mixed faith or no faith enrollment. Such ‘super mixed’ schools are a welcome reflection of the evolving demographics in Northern Ireland. However, they do not have as their principal object the teaching of mutual respect and tolerance for all faiths and no faith.
3. Conceptually, integrated education must have at its heart an ethos of such mutual respect and tolerance. Further, such an ethos must be pursued by a non-partisan Board of Governors whose principal purpose, in the furtherance of that ethos, is to ensure the integrity of its ‘integrated’ enrollment.
4. The bill as currently drafted risks enabling super mixed schools to argue that they qualify as integrated schools. This could have a two-fold effect. First, enabling such schools to argue that future legislation relating to integrated schools applies to them, as and when it suits. Second, and more worryingly, it may enable interests opposed to integrated education to frustrate the development of integrated education.
5. To address this issue, Section 1(2) of the bill could be amended accordingly: An “integrated school” is a school approved as such by the Department of Education which intentionally promotes, protects and improves an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities.