

Peter McCallion, Committee Clerk
Committee for Education
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16th November 2012

Dear Committee Clerk

Written submission on the Education Bill

Thank you for your invitation to submit evidence to the Education Committee in relation to the Education Bill.

The Community Relations Council (CRC) is not directly involved in educational provision yet we have a critical interest in this policy area and have recently made a number of submissions in relation to enhancing and increasing shared education (Appendix A) and produced a report 'Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century'¹ in partnership with the Equality Commission (ECNI) in 2010, which developed a set of strategic and local recommendations that focused on providing real opportunities to address the persistent inequalities of academic attainment and performance, as well as making a substantial contribution to improved social and community cohesion, both within and between the diverse social mix of our society (Appendix B). It is within this context that our observations are made.

- **Clause 60: General duty of the Department and DEL.**

CRC seeks an additional provision in the Bill under clause 60 to place a duty on the department of Education to promote shared education. The Bill should be revised to contain:

'It is the duty of the Department of Education to promote shared education.'

- **Clause 2: Functions and general duty of ESA**

CRC seeks an additional provision under clause 2 (2) to increase the functions and duties of ESA in relation to shared education:

2.-(1) ESA shall have the functions transferred to it by or under this Act or conferred or imposed on it by or under this Act or any other statutory provision.

(2) It is the duty of ESA (so far as its powers extend) –

¹ On behalf of the Good Relations Forum (April 2012)

ADD: *'to promote shared education.'*

- *Clause 29: Guidance-Area-Based Planning*

CRC has a specific interest in how the strategic planning of education on an area-based approach can support and increase levels of sharing on a cross-community sectoral basis, whilst contributing to better educational outcomes, sustaining communities, and reducing travel to schools. This Bill has the opportunity to mainstream a commitment of collaboration and engagement across all educational structures and CRC recommends the following addition to the functions of ESA in relation to Area-Based Planning:

Guidance

29.-(1) In preparing, revising or revoking a plan, ESA shall take into account any guidance issued by the Department under this section,

(ADD) and must have regard to the duty (in clause 60 (CRC amendment above)) in bringing forward and adopting area plans

Conclusion

CRC looks forward to continuing this important discussion with the Committee. If you need clarification please contact Gemma Attwood, Policy Officer at the following email gattwood@nicrc.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Pp Gemma Attwood

Jacqueline Irwin
Chief Executive

Appendix A

CRC's Response to Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education, November 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Question 1 – Best way to advance shared education in Northern Ireland?

- Current practice and evidence must have a stronger influence on the development of educational policy, in order to improve educational outcomes and advance sharing;
- Generate the political will and leadership to deliver on a shared education commitment along with a pledge to challenge the status quo and vested interests;
- Area Based Planning should include a requirement for schools to explore options for sharing, with a clear public preference for those options which promote normalised interaction and engagement;
- Facilitative dialogue should be promoted to encourage debate at an area based planning level;

Question 2 - Barriers

- Historical context and the legacy of the conflict continue to impact on educational provision;
- Currently have an unsympathetic policy environment and a weak political priority;
- Currently no incentive or recommendation to schools to pursue sharing, much less cross-community sharing;
- A crowded policy environment that is currently out of sequence with one another;
- External funders should press the Department on mainstreaming successful policy initiatives.;
- Lack of clarity or publication of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) Strategy/Programme is unhelpful to this current enquiry;

Question 3 – Shared Education & needs of Section 75 categories/socio-economic backgrounds

- Merit in identifying an issue or issues that transcends socio-economic background to initiate engagement - developing trust, relationships, and improving educational achievement;
- Not all interaction must be measured against an academic outcome or target;

Question 4 - Ethos and identity

- Core religious and cultural values and differences can be protected without fostering a sense of eternal polarisation or antagonism;
- The curriculum e.g. personal understanding, citizenship and cultural understanding can act as critical lever for ensuring safety, welfare, dignity and respect;
- Training and preparedness of the professionals will be critical;

Question 5 - Implications for the curriculum

- Collaborative working can support the aims of the curriculum and deliver better educational outcomes;

- Creating transferable skills that are needed to create and maintain harmonious work environments and cohesive communities;

Question 6 - Equality of opportunity and access for all

- Consider the application of a statutory duty on schools.
- Revisit Area based Plans and set out a programme of work in each area which has a clear plan to progress sharing. Options should be regularly reviewed during school development plans.
- Pair weak performing schools with stronger performing schools to improve educational objective, thereby providing the opportunity to enhance sharing on a cross-community basis;

Appendix B

Good Relations Forum, Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century (April 2010), CRC & ECNI.

<http://www.community-relations.org.uk/fs/doc/crc-good-relations-forum-booklet-final-21-april-2010-pdf.pdf>

School and Local Level:

- Compulsory good relations programmes in schools;
- Good practice to be shared and publicised;
- Capacity building programmes for existing school teaching staff;
- Capacity building of parents and local communities;
- Keeping local communities fully informed of the opportunity for possible collaboration, where school are at risk of being closed or new schools are planned.

Strategic Level:

- Strategic leadership - the Minister of Education and the Department of Education to give greater strategic direction to the schools sector to ensure that the teaching and practice of good relations is successfully mainstreamed across all schools.
- Culture change - by creating a culture of co-operation, partner schools and colleges can bring considerable resources and skills that both add value to the learning experiences of children and young people, and crucially, help schools to do things differently.
- Budget commitment to good relations programmes - the Department of Education to identify and commit a long-term and appropriate budget to supporting all schools to provide good relations modules within Citizenship programmes.
- Good Relations lens – the entire curriculum to be good relations proofed, at least in those subject areas where it is both relevant and appropriate to do so.
- Targeted support and resources - the Department and ESA to offer more targeted support and resources for those schools in areas that continue to experience considerable community conflict, segregation and disadvantage.
- Greater focus on sharing and collaboration within service delivery - the Department, ESA and other key educational stakeholders to focus on maximising value for money and avoiding duplication of educational provision, by placing a greater focus on existing drivers, policies and practices that encourage greater sharing and collaboration, particularly on a cross-community basis.
- Developing tools that measure change – the Department to develop a set of targets, as well as a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the changes to the level of collaboration and cooperation between local schools. This should be published yearly and publicised widely.
- Teacher, head teacher and governor training - the Department to ensure that amendments are made to the various training programmes by relevant regulatory

and training bodies, making good relations modules compulsory components of study.

- Greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges – the Department and ESA to encourage stronger collaboration between the different teacher training institutions, to ensure all student teachers, whatever their community background, have the appropriate time and opportunity to experience other sectors and school ethos. All initial teacher training courses/programmes to encompass an element of teaching from different sectors on a cross-community basis.
- Mapping future opportunities - Audits would help identify geographical areas for potential growth in integrated or shared education and changes in public attitudes, thus, providing a strategic context within which the transformation of schools might take place.
- A generic commitment to 'collaboration' cannot be allowed to disguise the imperative for inter-sectoral sharing which must result. Of course, some schools will have more opportunities than others to engage on a cross-community basis and there are already a number of schools delivering this in practice. However without an obligation to explore all options some schools may opt out of this opportunity. This collaboration cannot be allowed to occur on an ad-hoc basis - this could simply come down to it being easier to engage/collaborate cross sector (not cross community) and also happen at the discretion of Board of Governors or the Principal.