

Mervyn Storey
Chair of Education Committee
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

15 November 2012

Dear Mr Storey

Re: Education Bill

Please find enclosed a hard copy of the Integrated Education Fund's (IEF) response to the Education Bill 2012. The IEF has two main concerns with the proposed Bill. Firstly the duty of support within ESA afforded to Irish-medium education is excluded from the integrated sector, and secondly the make-up of the ESA Board not only excludes representation from integrated schools, but also represents a regurgitation of the same structural representation that continues to stagnate and segregate our education system. In our paper we have suggested amendments to the Bill that we feel address these concerns.

We would welcome any opportunities to continue to help inform the Education Bill and if you require any further information on the IEF's response please get in touch. You can contact Chris Jenkins at the IEF by email on chris@ief.org.uk or phone 028 9033 0031.

Yours sincerely



Marie Cowan
Chair, Integrated Education Fund

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Education Bill Response

Comments by the
Integrated Education Fund for the Education Committee
16th November 2012

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Integrated Education Fund

Comments on the Education Bill

The Department of Education has a legislative duty to encourage and facilitate the development of both Irish-medium and integrated education:

Article 64(1) of The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989:

There is a duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education

Article 89: The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003:

This places a duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education. Also under the 2003 Order, the Department may pay grants to any body appearing to have as an objective the encouragement or promotion of Irish-medium education

The Integrated Education Fund's first point of contention with the proposed Education Bill is that the statutory duty placed on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education has not been replicated in the duties of the new Education and Skills Authority. This legislative responsibility is being afforded only to the Irish Medium Sector:

2(5) ESA shall ensure that its functions relating to grant-aided schools are (so far as they are capable of being so exercised) exercised with a view to encouraging and facilitating the development of education provided in an Irish speaking school.

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) does not dispute the right of the Irish-medium sector to support but would demand the same support to be given to the integrated sector. Integrated schools not only offer a diverse and supportive learning environment, but they are recognised within shared future strategies as being a key component helping Northern Ireland to reform and to address its political history. There has been a dilution from previous commitments made to integrated education, such as the above quoted Article 64(1) Education Reform Order of 1989. The IEF considers such backtracking and neglect of duty to represent a serious failure in the Bill.

Secondly the Integrated Education Fund rejects the proposed breakdown of membership on the ESA Board. While subset A and subset B are allocated 4 representatives each: 4 persons "to represent the interests of transferors of controlled schools" and 4 persons "to represent the interests of trustees of maintained schools" (Education Bill 2012: Schedule 1 (2), pg 39), no such provision is given to schools within subset C. There should be at least one representative each for the integrated and Irish-medium sectors.

A further critique of this breakdown is that in progressing and moving the debate forward in education in Northern Ireland, with the goal of creating a high performing and inclusive system, the

IEF would question the grounds of equality and evidence base for continued influence of the churches and religious institutions on this Board. The breakdown of the Board reflects the current carve-up between our political parties and educational sectoral interests, and will ensure that education remains a political football with priority remaining with stakeholders rather than children. Representation on the Board should be afforded to independent educationalists, business representatives, and people aware of the challenges facing the economy for which our children need to be educated and trained.

Without consideration and adoption of the suggested changes, the Education Bill represents another failure and missed opportunity to challenge the segregated and stagnated nature of the institutions that govern our education system.

In summary the IEF proposes the following amendments to the proposed Education Bill 2012:

2 (5) ESA shall ensure that its functions relating to grant-aided schools are (so far as they are capable of being so exercised) exercised with a view to encouraging and facilitating the development of education provided **in both integrated and Irish speaking schools.**

Schedule 1 (2)

(c) 12 persons appointed by the Department (“appointed members”) of whom—

(i) **2 shall be persons appearing to the Department to represent the interests of transferors of controlled schools**, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;

(ii) **2 shall be persons appearing to the Department to represent the interests of trustees of maintained schools**, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;

(iii) **1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of integrated schools**, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;

(iv) **1 shall be a person appearing to the Department to represent the interests of the Irish-medium sector**, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;

(v) **3 shall be persons appearing to the Department, so far as practicable, to be representative of the community in Northern Ireland:** and

(vi) **3 shall be persons appearing to the Department to represent the interests of the business community in Northern Ireland.**

(d) The representation and make-up of the Board should be reviewed every three years.