



**Education Committee Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate
Submission**

September 2013

Integrated Education Fund
41-43 University Street
Belfast BT7 1FY
Tel: 028 9033 0031
Email: Georgina@ief.org.uk

The IEF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Committee for Education Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

About IEF

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was established in 1992 with money from EU Structural Funds, the Department of Education NI, the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, as a financial foundation for the development and growth of integrated education.

The IEF seeks to bridge the financial gap between starting integrated schools and securing full government funding and support.

The IEF financially supports the establishment of new schools, the growth of existing schools and those schools seeking to become integrated through the transformation process.

The Board of Trustees, which at 01 July 2013 has 13 members, administers the charity; the day to day operations of the IEF are managed by the Chief Executive, appointed by the Board, and her staff. The Board is made up of individuals nominated by the founding bodies together with others co-opted for their skills and expertise. Trustees receive no remuneration from the Fund. In addition, there is a Campaign Executive made up of volunteers which is chaired by Baroness Blood, supported by Volunteer Teams in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

The Fund is accepted as a charity by the Inland Revenue under Reference XR52574.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity within this enquiry to identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in terms of improvement; including the need for enhanced powers and alternative measures of achievement and transparency. To date, the Department of Education's response to school improvement has been through schools participating in self-evaluation and self-improvement; a policy on literacy and numeracy; and, a review of organisational delivery structures (area planning, Educational and Skills Authority, Education Bill).

The IEF is greatly concerned that the final area based plans have yet to be produced and that the introduction of the Education and Skills Authority has stalled. That body, when established, will be tasked with the difficult challenge of addressing the continuous problem of area-based planning. It is clear that these measures have had little impact on the key problem of segregation facing the education system in Northern Ireland and there is a need to consider some creative alternatives.

Context

The Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) Policy (DE, 2011) aimed to make community relations an integral part of education that should align with increased sharing and collaboration within the education system to enable children and young people to come together in a more consistent manner. The CRED policy represented an intention to address criticism from the ETI (2009) about the absence of a clear policy on community relations work in education, particularly limitations in the level of support and access to continuing professional development that teachers receive in this area. The ETI stated “there is little evidence that the promotion and development of good community relations have been prioritised within the Department of Education.”

We remain unconvinced as to the effectiveness of the Department of Education incentivising, supporting and monitoring a “whole school-community approach” to building sustainable cross-community relations. In light of the commitment stated in the policy, it is imperative that the Department of Education Minister sends a strong signal and message of his commitment to a shared future and the civic leadership role of schools and integrated education in that task. A whole school approach means giving children and young people an opportunity whether in formal or non-formal education to think about why the areas they live in are the way they are, to meet adults from a range of occupations and expertises, to learn outside the classroom in unusual places and to critically place themselves in relation to alternative ways of knowing.

Key recommendations

The IEF has a clear vision about the key elements that should be considered in an alternative measure of achievement under the ETI.

The IEF believes that all schools in receipt of public money should work towards becoming inclusive shared spaces where children from all backgrounds, including Catholic and Protestant, have the opportunity to learn, play and grow together in an environment, which respects and celebrates difference. Educational reform should be more than managing separation. This should be incentivised by the Department for Education and monitored by the ETI to ensure continuous improvement and progression.

We believe changes to our current legislation, under the new Education Act, should place a duty on all schools in receipt of public money to be ‘inclusive shared spaces’ and strive towards being open to children from all political, religious and cultural backgrounds that make up Northern Ireland. This could be demonstrated, for

example, by governance arrangements, the delivery of the curriculum, symbols and emblems, denominational religious education/faith formation and the provision of sporting and cultural activities.

We recommend that a school's inclusive and shared ethos is monitored and progressively verified by the Education and Training Inspectorate using qualitative and quantitative measures. These reports should be published on a periodic basis and widely available.

In addition, there should be a clear expectation on all primary schools to be open to receiving and welcoming post-primary schools from all sectors wishing to encourage P6 and P7 children to transfer to their school. The ETI should have a clear role in monitoring and addressing access inequalities, seeking significant changes over time.

Conclusion

We believe there needs to be a shift in focus within inspections to the value which schools add to pupils' learning rather than a reliance on self-evaluation and improvement, a system which lacks incentives or punitive measures for poorly performing schools. The ETI should oversee a new system of cross-community networked learning, incentivised through a shared and integrated education premium, aimed at raising educational outcomes for all children.

The IEF is pleased to respond to this inquiry. If there is any further way in which we can contribute to the consultation process, we would welcome the opportunity to do so.