



**Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education**

# **Shared and Integrated Education Inquiry**

**Shared Education in Moyle**

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**In Moyle, both Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College have a sense of helping to shape the future:**

**Background:**

We have a strong sense of the successful history enjoyed by both schools and by the pupils who have attended our schools over the years. Pupils are drawn mainly from the town of Ballycastle and the rural hinterland surrounding the town. We enjoy a high level of loyalty from the community, with in many instances, several generations of families having attended the schools.

While enjoying this sense of history we are very aware of the role played by Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College in having helped to shape the future.

This vision of collaboration, efficient use of resources and increased choice, has proven to be highly beneficial to the pupils, parents, schools and the local community. This vision continues to grow with our involvement in the Shared Education Programme with Atlantic Philanthropies and Q.U.B. This project and current support has enabled further advancements of our vision to enhance shared provision for post-primary pupils in the Ballycastle area. At Key Stages 4 and 5 significant progress has been made in relation to meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and furthering cross curricular activities.

The vision and ethos has grown organically within a heartfelt context of mutual dependency and respect for each-others differences. This non-threatening sense of shared purpose and simple 'good neighbourliness' has impacted significantly on cross community relations.

In a socially deprived area such as ours, many parents still just want the best life chances possible for their children. This is the pervading attitude of most of our parents. But this sense of aspiration and expectation has to be nurtured by effective communication and genuine open, caring relationships. Parents know that every child matters in both our schools. We earnestly endeavour to show our parents that education has in the past and can in the future provide the vehicle for their children's advancement.

We are both non-selective schools and our pupils cover the full range in relation to academic ability. Both schools benefit hugely from that diversity and the wide range of talents, characteristics and personalities presented by each of our pupils.

Our location and degree of geographic isolation has also been of benefit, with parents choosing to send their children to us instead of attending schools elsewhere. But we cannot take this for granted and the teaching staff and support staff are keenly aware of our need to continue to be successful schools which enjoy the full confidence of the community.

### **Nature of Shared Education in Ballycastle**

Almost 300 pupils attend weekly shared curricular classes – 139 CPC pupils taking classes in BHS and 148 BHS pupils taking classes in CPC.

#### **Vision and Leadership**

- Collaborative Sub-committees with representatives from both of Boards of Governors has been formed – their focus relates to the planning of the collaborative curriculum offer, standards and attainment and pastoral care and well-being of pupils involved in the collaboration.
- Governors have jointly agreed the core values/ principles underpinning the partnership and the purpose of the collaborative arrangements (Appendix One)
- There is a shared approach School Development Planning in relation to 14-19 attainment and related school improvement actions.
- Regular opportunities for leaders at levels of management in the school to meet plan monitor and evaluate provision together – this includes Principals, Senior Leaders, Curriculum and Pastoral Leaders

#### **Curriculum**

- The partnership provides a wide range of BTEC, AS/A level and GCSE subjects, with subject option blocks aligned. 6<sup>th</sup> Form and Key Stage 4 provision meets Entitlement Framework requirements. Additional subjects are delivered in partnership with Northern Regional College.
- The nature of the curriculum offer reflects the ‘ All Ability’, inclusive nature of the two schools, the diverse nature of young peoples’ aspiration in terms of their progression to further and higher education as well as the needs of the local and wider economy

#### **Extra- Curricular / Curricular Enrichment Provision includes:**

- A Joint School council ensure that pupils views and opinions are sought and taken on board in relation to planning and organisation of provision
- A range of shared careers education events
- Joint Year 8 and 9 Rugby team
- Joint Choir, concerts and orchestral activities.
- Charity fundraising activities.

There is much evidence that the impact of the partnership extends beyond the classrooms into the wider community.

The Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group 2013; 'Advancing Shared Education' suggested that there are seven key principles that need be at the heart of efforts to advance shared education.

Shared Education:

1. Welcomes and celebrates diversity and respects the right of children and young people to be educated in accordance with their own religious, cultural or philosophical traditions while also ensuring that they develop an understanding and respect for others by having significant and meaningful opportunities to be educated together with those from different backgrounds;
2. Ensures that all children have access to a quality education and enjoy equal opportunities within the education system, and thus has a particular concern with identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people from vulnerable and/or marginalised backgrounds;
3. Is built upon strong links with parents and care-givers, fostered in early childhood and maintained throughout each child's progression through the education system, and respects the role they play in supporting their child's education and development;
4. Provides all children and young people with a broad-based and holistic education whilst also ensuring that this is progressively tailored to meet their individual needs and to help develop their particular strengths and talents to the fullest;
5. Helps children and young people develop a greater awareness of and respect for diversity, in all its forms, and equips them with the knowledge and skills to be able to live in an open, inclusive and confident society;
6. Respects the rights and dignity of all children and young people, ensures that their views and opinions are heard and responded to and promotes their safety and wellbeing; and
7. Acknowledges the central importance of good leadership in schools and the quality of teachers and support staff and thus places a particular emphasis on ensuring high quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities that encourage teachers and educationalists learning and sharing together.

**It is our contention that the above summary encompasses the core and essence of what shared education is in the Ballycastle context.**

## Key Barriers and Enablers for Shared Education

**This response is based on the experience of a long standing sharing of educational resources and expertise in Ballycastle. It reflects our thoughts on barriers and enablers at system wide level.**

### Enablers

**The strength and quality of the partnership is a crucial enabler. Shared education will flourish in a strong partnership where;**

- each partner feels equal and is confident of the purpose, worth and value of their own institution and of the contribution it can make to the success of the partnership
- the essential nature of the context, history, ethos and value system in each school is understood and respected
- where there is a strong sense of common purpose and commitment to the concept of sharing for the greater good of the young people and the wider community in which they will live and work

### The Commitment of Key Stakeholders:

The support of those working at **planning and policy level** in the education system at all levels is vital if Shared Education is become a recognised part of the education system in Northern Ireland. This includes:

- Department of Education
- The new Education Authority including the full range of educational stakeholders included in this ELB's / CCMS / Trustees/ Others

It is essential that those who are key decision makers see this as an authentic, sustainable and appropriate option for communities which can impact positively in three ways;

- It can provide the option for a choice of type of school which reflects the aspirations, beliefs, culture and identity of pupils and their parents whilst at the same providing authentic, high quality opportunities to accept diversity and indeed come to understand and value each others traditions
- It can avoid duplication, make economic sense through the sharing of resources
- Sharing and good use of resources can have a significant impact on outcomes for young people

### The confidence of Parents and Pupils

Pupils and their parents need to be absolutely confident that the sharing arrangements will work for their pupils – entrusting your child's education, even if it is only in a limited number of subjects to another school is a real challenge. It is vital therefore that the quality of leadership, teaching and learning and well-being and care of young people is of the highest standard possible. Where there are shared arrangements, pupils and their parents must be kept well informed about the

opportunities available through sharing, arrangements for monitoring progress, meeting teachers and so on. The arrangement needs to be underpinned by Service Level Agreements, robust protocols and shared policies relating to key areas of shared educational experience.

### **Policy context**

**It is important that the policy context for education enables Shared Education however it is equally important that Shared Education will enhance the implementation of policy.**

For example, the following DE policy areas can be delivered much more efficiently and effectively in some areas where well established shared arrangements exist:

- Entitlement Framework
- ESAGS – Raising Educational Attainment
- Literacy and Numeracy Strategy including the Signature Teacher Project
- Tackling educational disadvantage
- STEM activities
- CRED

### **Meeting a real educational need**

Shared Education will only be successful in the educational and economic sense if it meets a real need. Where it facilitates enhanced curriculum provision and choice for young people, where it increases access to specialist teaching and or accommodation and where it makes better use of resources, it will be effective and worthwhile.

### **Training and Development of Governors and Staff**

The development of high quality Shared Education experiences is a challenge for school leaders, governors and staff. It adds an additional, but in our experience very worthwhile layer to the leadership, governance, and management of schools involved. The availability of training opportunities would;

- Increase awareness of the significant benefits / opportunities which shared education offers
- Increase awareness of the particular challenges
- Support schools in developing the leadership capabilities of those involved
- Facilitate the sharing of good practice

### **Co-location**

Shared Education opportunities have to make sense and enhance young peoples' experience as opposed to adding unnecessary cost and travel time. It therefore works best where school are in close proximity to one another.

**Barriers**

**There are a number of potential barriers to Shared Education Arrangements – on reflection they mostly relate to the absence of the ‘Enablers’ outlined above.**

**Geographical Distance**

Sharing of day to day educational experiences is infinitely more difficult if it involves long distances and the use of public transport / taxis etc on a long term basis and is therefore often a barrier to authentic, sustained sharing.

### **Priorities and actions to improve Shared Education including relevant parts of CRED policy.**

The aim of the CRED policy is to:

Contribute to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self-respect and respect for others, promote equality and work to eliminate discrimination, and by providing formal and non-formal education opportunities for them to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions within the resources available.

In every sense the aim of the Community Relations Equality and Diversity policy is totally embedded in the ethos of both Cross and Passion College and Ballycastle High School. The key relationships within the partnership have been nurtured in an organic, genuine, natural evolution. A culture of mutual respect for each other's differences and a genuine desire to be good neighbours permeates every aspect of what the schools do.

However, there is no scope for complacency and everyone has to be mindful of inadvertent issues arising which may have unforeseen negative consequences. Everyone is mindful of the power of perception which is not borne out in reality. Poor communication or mixed messages can create misunderstandings which are at best inconvenient and at worst damaging to the partnership.

Both schools have separate identities reflecting the key aspects of faith, aspiration and identity for their respective communities. The fact that a choice exists as to which school parents/guardians choose to send pupils to is critical. There is nothing threatening or competitive in the relationship that exists in Ballycastle between the two schools. The fundamental premise that ours is a partnership based upon mutual need and individual choice is correct and highly significant.

The objectives of the CRED policy are:

- Ensure that learners, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination; and
- Educate children and young people to live and participate in a changing world, so that they value and respect difference and engage positively with it, taking account of the ongoing intercommunity divisions arising from conflict and increasing diversity within our society; and
- Equip children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to develop mutual understanding and recognition of, and respect for, difference.

It is our contention that the experience of Shared Education in Ballycastle more than fulfils the aims and objectives of the CRED policy. However, it may be the case that this has been largely by default as opposed to design. The catalyst which initiated the partnership and is still at its heart, is to have a pragmatic relationship which best meets the educational needs of post primary pupils in Ballycastle and the surrounding area. In our locality, this is best achieved through Shared Education. As long both schools continue to successfully meet this need and achieve good outcomes for all pupils then the partnership will prosper. However, if parents or guardians lose faith in the educational capabilities of either school then the partnership will struggle. The societal and cross community benefits which have developed for our partnership are strong. However, they would be negatively impacted if confidence was lost in either school.



## **Appendix One Making the Partnership work in Ballycastle**

The essence of Shared Education in Ballycastle has been present for many decades. The partnership has been nurtured and developed on a basis **of joint need** and mutual respect and a desire to develop in an organic and sensitive way.

A desire to best meet the educational needs of post-primary pupils in the area, has resulted in a sense that the two main denominations and communities in Ballycastle and the surrounding area are closer together. This has obviously been benefited by increasing social and political stability over a number of years.

### **Promoting Standards and higher levels of achievement**

Of key importance in our Shared Education partnership is expecting, setting and communicating high standards of teaching, and achievement for both teachers and pupils. Promoting a culture of high expectations and success from all pupils, of all abilities, is fundamental to the success of both schools and the partnership. Fostering and sustaining a work ethic within the schools among the pupil body is again central. Closely monitoring on an agreed regular basis, the standards of work, effort, tracking and target setting for each pupil and sharing the results with pupils and their parents. Frequently communicated to provide immediate feedback to pupils on their progress and allowing parents to feel part of the achievement process. Hard working pupils are rewarded and recognised – ‘there is no drug like success’! We jointly continue to develop the effective use of data to inform target setting, and we see further potential in developing this. It is the level of success achieved by pupils in both our schools which provides the ‘cement’ that sustains the partnership

As Senior Leaders we feel it is important to be aware of our own need to develop professionally and to work effectively with others. We are continually striving to develop a collegiate approach among our staff towards the work of the partnership. Teachers work together to enable staff to be more aware of whole school issues such as discipline, extra-curricular enrichment activities, and raising standards. This means that the partnership works as a team for the good of all the pupils involved. Enabling senior colleagues to have their leadership skills fully realised and utilised to empower them to develop their strategic views and opinions is also essential.

### **Well being**

A culture of pro-active Pastoral Care and a firm, fair and compassionate approach to discipline is very important to pupils, parents and guardians in both schools. Maintaining effective discipline in the schools avoids many time-consuming problems of a pastoral/behavioural nature which dissipate teachers’ energy; frustrate both pupils and their parents and which dilute the education and sharing process. These standards come from the top and need to be implemented in a firm, fair, consistent and compassionate way. In practice this means:

- Daily exchange of information eg absentees and events etc.
- Close pastoral contacts with Heads of Year and scheduled meetings.
- Regular joint Departmental Meetings for subjects sharing teaching.

- Btec Meetings – Consortium arrangements in place.
- Co-ordination of Parents’ Afternoons with parents going to each school to speak to teachers.
- Joint 6th Form Student Council
- Leadership Awards
- Sports coaching training

As our partnership has grown and become more embedded the requirement to avoid needless administrative and systemic barriers has been considered. We have taken steps to minimise issues but this is an ongoing challenge and needs to be constantly monitored, evaluated and reviewed.

Both schools now:

- Endeavour to synchronise holidays and Staff Development Days.
- Close co-ordination and co-operation in timetable construction and curriculum planning.
- Close liaison between Principals in relation to staffing requirements
- Occasional sharing of facilities eg Assembly Hall.
- Collaboration in relation to school improvement this has included alignment in relation to reporting times and systems, target setting and pupil tracking procedures.
- Regular joint staff development and training.
- Aligning of key objectives for PRSD.

The benefits of shared education have been:

- The partnership enables the schools to meet Entitlement Framework requirements.
- Pupils of both schools benefit from a broad range of curricular choice, allowing them to make the most of their talents and abilities.
- Staff benefit from mutually supportive networks, developing next practice.
- Staff, pupils and parents from different backgrounds interact in a sustained, regular basis.
- Societal and economic benefits.
- Joint Board of Governors Sub-groups meet to consider the key aspects of collaboration.
- Careful consideration is given to joint School Development Plan objectives.

Another enabling factor in the development of Shared Education has been engaging meaningfully with other external agencies in the local community. This is central to the dynamics that exist in the town of Ballycastle. For example charities, schools, churches, social services, the PSNI, Council etc all have their own agendas, but the combined synergy of these interactions does benefit significantly certain individuals in our schools and in the community. If co-ordinated and funded appropriately these combined actions can bring significant benefit to shared partnership. Finding the time to foster

these relationships is essential to the idea of partnership, sharing and networking. It can be difficult to find that time, but it is highly important.

It is a key priority in both Cross and Passion College and Ballycastle High School to have cognisance of the need to address potential underachievement in disadvantaged communities. Both schools serve a wide hinterland which has significant pockets of social deprivation. Meeting the needs of this constituency is important to maintaining our partnership. Of equal importance is meeting the aspirations of parents and pupils from other socio-economic backgrounds. Both schools are highly aware of this and as such also promote an ethos which closely aligned to a key area of securing accountability.

Both schools place importance on the monitoring of examination statistics and bench marking data which is necessary to reveal extent of any problem. Also, to promote and develop a culture in the partnership of self-reflection and school improvement by making effective use of the data that is available.

Both schools have in the past in offered supportive literacy and numeracy classes to pupils showing underachievement in the first three years. Also, the work currently underway in developing the use of Cross Curricular Skills for Levels of Progression does have the potential to further support literacy and numeracy, within and across the curriculum of both schools. The appointment on a joint basis of teachers to support Literacy and Numeracy as part of the Signature Project has proven to be successful and potentially provides a model for further development.

Both schools endeavour to make effective use of ICT resources to support literacy and numeracy and promote effective teaching and learning. This emphasis, coupled with purposeful whole class teaching and where appropriate, individual personalised support, is an attempt to ensure all pupils are supported to reach their potential. Work is currently on going with C2kni to develop the Partnership Exchange procedure which will permit easier access to staff and pupils in both schools to a wider range of C2k ICT based systems and resources in both schools.

The partnerships systems which relate to the review of performance and provision are constantly evolving and developing and being tweaked! The benefits at micro (school) and macro (system) level could be significant. But these must be managed within the dynamic, vibrant environment that is a school. We need to secure a balance, with the restrictions and pressures of time constraints and not losing sight of the fundamental importance of positive relationships in bringing about effective change.

Securing accountability within the context of Department of Education's School Improvement Policy – Every School a Good School The and 'Together towards improvement' – especially the latter - are good publications since they spell out what good practice looks like on the ground. The publication by the Education and Training Inspectorate of; 'Quality Indicators for use in the evaluation of IFI Sharing in Education Funded Projects' has also been a useful enabling tool.

Both Principals and Governors are very grateful for the effective practical support which is essential from external agencies. PEACE 3 funded projects, the Shared Education Project (Atlantic Philanthropies and Q.U.B.) and the North Eastern Education and Library Board funded Peace, Inclusion, Reconciliation, Citizenship and History Project (PIRCH) have been beneficial recent vehicles in moving forward with our Shared Education Partnership and collaborative arrangements. However, continued support from CASS, CCEA etc to support effective and co-ordinated implementation of our strategies is required. There is a real danger of overwhelming staff, which can create confusion. Gaining and retaining staff ownership of initiative implementation is essential to sustaining a

positive working culture in our schools and partnership. The situation is not helped when changes come about which necessitate re-planning and re-scheduling.

A key example of this barrier relates to funding for the Entitlement Framework. The uncertainty which surrounds this critical supportive scaffold of our partnership is most unhelpful. Senior Leaders and Governors need clear direction and information relating to funding which is required to sustain our collaborative arrangements.

The quality of support for schools from RTU in relation to Shared Education is important. The assistance provided to schools is particularly important at a time of significant staffing changes within a school. Anything which eases succession planning and transition in relation to leadership/teaching changes within a school is important. This takes on even more critical significance in a Shared Education Partnership when it is more than one school which can be impacted by significant staffing changes.

Both Principals feel that they must comment upon the fact that that both Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College are considered to be a relatively successful schools in an area of social deprivation. This fact is testament to the hard work of staff, parents and pupils – sometimes in difficult physical conditions. We are in dire need of suitable, effective and indeed at times, a healthy and safe working environment. Our staff and children should not be made to feel second class in relation to their school buildings. We feel it is important at this time of financial constraint, that we should not lose sight of the urgent need for school refurbishment if not replacement of schools.

Both schools require capital investment in order to facilitate the partnership achieving its full potential. It is vital that the statutory bodies continue to support the schools in facilitating proposals for bespoke new builds and shared centres that will allow the partnership to develop fully. The North Eastern Board Area Plan for the post-primary schools in Ballycastle and the Department of Education announcement in July, relating to the Shared Campuses Programme have been welcomed by all key stakeholders. It is important that these commitments are fulfilled as soon as possible.

## Appendix 2



### SHARED EDUCATION IN MOYLE

#### Core Values

It is really important to us that the partnership;

- Is all inclusive
- Caters for young people of all abilities and aptitudes
- Respects and promotes the unique identity and ethos of each school
- Reflects the needs and aspirations of the wider community
- Is pupil centred – the needs and well-being of young people at the centre
- Reaches out to and supports young people who are marginalised and vulnerable
- Embraces the richness of difference
- Promotes excellence – high standards
- Has the absolute confidence of the community
- Enables each young person to have a strong sense of loyalty to and pride in their own school
- Enables each young person to have a strong loyalty to and pride in the partnership

#### What is the purpose of the partnership?

- To enhance educational opportunities for all young people in post primary education in North Antrim – enhancing choice – promoting quality
- To improve outcomes for young people at Key Stages 4 and 5
- To make the best use of educational resources available
- To promote and nurture mutual respect and understanding as well as community cohesion
- To provide the local and wider community with young people who have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make value contributions to the economic and community life the area

