

**COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION INQUIRY INTO SHARED
AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION.**

Written Evidence from Ballymena Borough Council

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INQUIRY INTO SHARED AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

The Committee for Education is undertaking an Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education and is seeking written submissions from interested parties by 24 October 2014.

The Terms of Reference are as follows:-

The Education Committee will:

- Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education as it applies across all educational phases - including consideration of the need for a formal statutory definition and an obligation in Statute to facilitate and encourage Shared Education;
- identify the key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education;
- identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of policy interventions and programmes;
- Consider what priorities and actions need to be taken to improve sharing and integration - including the effectiveness of the relevant parts of the CRED (Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education) Policy;
- the need to engage more effectively with parents/carers; and the role of Special Schools;
- and
- Report to the Assembly on its findings and recommendations by Spring 2015.

Shared Education

“Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

In 2012 the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Advancement of Shared Education in Northern Ireland, states the organisation and delivery of shared education must :

- *Meet the needs of, and provide for the education of learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic groups together;*
- *involve schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and*
- *deliver educational benefits to learners, promote the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.”*

Submission

Ballymena Borough Council is of the view that there can be many positive impacts of Shared Education, as defined above. Shared Facilities/Campuses/Equipment has clear advantages for schools and the wider community in terms of resourcing/funding and efficiencies, which are becoming ever more important in the current economic and budgetary climate.

- Shared Education can provide an important mechanism for ensuring that children and young people have access to a wider range of subjects and courses;
- collaboration between schools can provide an effective means for teachers to share good practice and engage in professional development; and
- research shows most children and young people, and their parents and/or care-givers, involved in Shared Education initiatives find the experience a positive one and encourage more positive attitudes and relationships between children and young people from different backgrounds.

However, Council are of the view:

- It is important that particular models of collaboration are not imposed on schools but that they are allowed to develop organically, reflecting the needs and situations that exist at a local level;
- the existing funding model for schools tends to create competition between schools and can inhibit the extent to which schools feel able to genuinely collaborate;
- there are clear resource implications for schools and other educational institutions wishing to engage in Shared Education, and thus some mechanism for supporting and incentivising schools to be involved in cross-sectoral collaboration is required;
- school collaboration is not easy and presents significant practical challenges in relation to matters such as timetabling, curriculum planning and transport and thus strong leadership within schools is essential; and
- Council would also welcome a statutory definition of Shared Education.

Integrated Education

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) defines Integrated Education as follows:

“Integrated Education brings children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths, or none, together in one school. Integrated schools have been an alternative to an educational system in which most children attend largely religiously separated schools. Integrated Schools differ from other schools in Northern Ireland by ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds are educated together every day in the same classrooms. Through their Admissions Criteria they enrol approximately equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant children, as well as children from other religious and cultural backgrounds.”

It is important to note that Integrated schools are not secular but are essentially Christian in character and welcome all faiths, which aims to provide children with a caring and enhanced educational experience. Empowering them as individuals is seen as a priority so that as children grow and mature, they'll be able to affect positive change in a shared society."

Submission

Whilst Ballymena Borough Council appreciates the concerns and apprehensions that exist towards Integrated Education, Council generally believe that Integrated Education may represent a positive choice for some parents and pupils. In 32 years the number of children educated in Integrated schools has grown from 28 pupils in 1981 to nearly 22,000 today. This has been mainly brought about by a desire for a different choice of education for children and young people.

A recent Millward Brown survey found that 83% of parents in Belfast believe that Integrated Education is a vital part of building a shared future in Northern Ireland. Over 70% of parents believe that adequate funding for Integrated Education should be made available, with enough places available for those who wish to send their children to an integrated school. Council would support this view but we must emphasise that it is essential that parents and pupils are free to choose other forms of education as they wish.