



CM/GMcM

7 November 2014

Mr Peter McCallion
Committee for Education
Room 375, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Dear Peter

Shared and Integrated Education

Further to your letter dated 10 September 2014, please find attached, the Belfast board's response to your request for written evidence, which was approved at the board meeting on Thursday 6 November 2014.

Yours sincerely

Dr Clare Mangan
Chief Executive

Enc

Direct telephone line – 028 9056 4041
Fax – 028 9043 9861
E-mail address – Clare.Mangan@belb.co.uk



Towards a Learning City

Belfast Education and Library Board

Response to a request for written evidence on
Shared/Integrated Education inquiry made by Northern Ireland
Assembly Committee for Education.

October 2014

Shared/Integrated Education inquiry

The Committee for Education is undertaking an Inquiry into Shared/Integrated Education. The terms of reference for the Committee's Inquiry are set out below.

The Committee will:

- Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education 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 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.

Introduction

Section 1

Belfast Education and Library Board



The Belfast Education and Library Board was established in 1973 and from this date has made significant contribution to the changing educational landscape of Belfast through innovative, creative and dynamic initiatives and support in education and youth contexts.

As the local authority the board:

- takes account of the need to provide pre-school education;
- ensures that there is adequate provision for pupils of compulsory school age;
- makes suitable provision for children who have been identified as having special education needs; and
- contributes to the moral, spiritual, cultural, intellectual and physical development of the community.

The board also secures the provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth activities and of other services ancillary to education.

The Belfast Education and Library Board is committed to providing a quality education and youth service which contributes to life-long learning for all the people of Belfast. As an education and library board we provide services to all school sectors at all levels – controlled, maintained, voluntary, Irish medium and integrated sectors. As a board we have a proven record of supporting schools programmes that have involved young people and schools engaging in shared education.

Section 2

Response to the terms of reference

2.1 Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education 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.

Comment:

1. Educational bodies and institutions will have their own definition and understanding of shared education based on their individual contexts. BELB believes that a clear and concise definition of Shared Education that is understood and shared by all is an important starting point for dialogue and development of a holistic approach to a system wide definition of shared education programmes. A clear nomenclature around shared education should help to facilitate understanding and help to allay misconceptions.
2. Recent definitions include:
 - ‘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.’ (*Minister’s terms of reference and accepted by the Ministerial Advisory Group*).
 - ‘Working definition: shared education refers to schools from different sectors working together in a sustained process ranging from two or more schools making shared use of specialist facilities, through to coordinated timetabling, and pupils taking classes across a network of schools.’ (*Professor Colin Knox University of Ulster*).
 - ‘Shared education involves young people from diverse backgrounds learning together, enabling them to recognise and value diversity and develop higher levels of mutual understanding. It refers to methodologies and environments where pupils interact by sharing, building on and widening one another’s knowledge, skills and experiences and beginning to reconcile differences to promote a shared future. Shared education is more than just a shared space.’ (*A Final Evaluation of the International Fund for Ireland’s Sharing in Education Programme 2013*).
3. Each of these definitions highlight key aspects of shared education:
 1. It is important that the definition indicates that Shared Education is not solely about promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion (important as they

are) but also emphasizes (first and foremost) that it is about delivering educational benefits to learners as highlighted in the *Ministerial Advisory Group definition*. The wider evidential research demonstrates clearly that collaboration between schools can play a significant role in terms of school improvement, related to:

- pupil performance (attainment, engagement, motivation and behaviour)
 - teacher development (motivation, morale, practice enhanced skills relationships)
 - leadership
 - economic improvements (sharing resources)
- <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/reports.html>.

This explicit link to learning in part should go some way to reassuring schools and parents about the fundamental purpose of shared education.

2. It is to an extent a given that it involves schools from different sectors working together, however within the historical context of Northern Ireland this is often taken to mean schools/pupils from a Protestant and Catholic background. Given the greater diversity of pupils in NI schools from different religious and cultural backgrounds any definition should reflect this, similar to the Sharing in Education Programme definition. Possibly cognisance should be taken to the fact that there is increasing diversity between schools from the same sector.
3. A definition of shared education should also indicate that shared education is not simply about a 'one off' event, a series of activities/events or lessons but rather is a sustained process to embed approaches/strategies (whole school approach) as indicated by Professor Colin Knox.
4. Any definition needs to reflect the changing composition of society and the increasing diversity of the population in Northern Ireland. We are living in an increasingly multicultural society and there is much work to be done to achieve respectful and welcoming relationships with people from different cultures. Shared education needs to be about more than the two main communities. Globalisation has demonstrated the interconnectedness of people's lives around the world.

2.2 Identify the key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education.

Comment:

Enablers

1. There needs to be clear and committed leadership to the values and principles of shared education from the Board of Governors, principal and senior leadership team. (whole school approach). This should be linked to appropriate professional development to ensure staff are trained and developed.
2. The Northern Ireland Curriculum provides a sound foundation through a broad and balanced curriculum with opportunities in areas such as PDMU, Local and Global Citizenship and other aspects of Learning for Life and Work, for pupils to address issues such as race, gender, diversity etc. (section 75 categories). All subject strands but in particular, Religious Education, History, Geography, English, Languages, Drama and Art and Design provide opportunities for teachers to develop curriculum experiences that explore identity, diversity and promote reconciliation, developing the attitudes and dispositions. However, some aspects can be lost when 'educational performance' becomes an overriding factor. (Blocker - many of these areas in the former group are often allocated less curricular time).
3. A fully resourced and sustained programme of continuing professional development for governors, school leaders, and teachers to support, develop, promote best practice and identify next practice in the NIC.
4. Comment could be made in ETI inspection reports on schools with existing 'shared education' elements active in the school whether through formalised programmes, curriculum provision, extracurricular provision or community links. Highlighting effective practice.
5. The education and library boards (education authority) as part of its work with schools could identify and disseminate effective practice.
6. Schools and organisations could evaluate consistently the impact of the work of reconciliation on the young people's attitudes, behaviours, understanding and skills to be able to demonstrate clearly the progress of young people and to inform future planning.
7. When compiling future school development plans that targets relating to "Shared Education" priorities are identified and detailed. This could relate to point 6 above.
8. The work of the Area Learning Communities could be extended and developed to include a greater focus on shared education. A similar approach could be extended to primary schools (Primary Area Learning Communities).

9. A more collaborative/partnership and focused approach between the education and library boards and schools at induction/early professional development and continuing professional development to ensure high quality professional development opportunities that encourage teachers and support bodies learning and sharing together.
10. Collaborative approach between the school(s), parents, local community groups, statutory bodies in developing programmes which are contextualised and develop out of local community and school's needs. For example, since the late 1990s Edenderry Nursery and Holy Cross Nursery have established a model of collaboration in education across an interface area in North Belfast. The project runs exchange days/play days between schools. This involves a full class from each school travelling to spend a day in the other school. The programme is focused on enabling children to meet and play with their 'buddies' and the day runs like any other with children engaging in circle time, play, story time etc. A joint parents' programme is delivered in tandem with this. Parents participate jointly in cross community workshops, cookery programmes, parenting programmes, arts and craft activities etc within both nursery settings.
11. The confidence of parents and pupils
 - Pupils and their parents need to be absolutely confident that the sharing arrangements will work for their pupils. 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.
12. 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;
 - history, ethos and value system in each school is understood and respected;
 - Shared resources, such as a teacher;
 - Building capacity, Board of Governors, principals and teachers;
 - Planning together (teachers).
13. All area based plans should also give cognisance/reflect a degree of shared education campuses.
14. School development proposals should have a section to indicate how the proposal will contribute to shared education.
15. Shared education placements between initial teacher education Institutions to enable student teachers to spend an 'extended' time (or)

take part of their course in another institution.

16. Modelling of 'Good Practice' in shared education principles across the education sectors – increasing collaboration between the education support bodies.

Barriers

1. Work may be needed in persuading schools that Shared Education programmes/sharing campuses will lead to real and measurable improvements in the quality of education that they provide and in raising educational achievement among their pupils.
2. Depending on the extent and nature of shared education, some schools may perceive it as a threat to their 'identity'/'ethos.' In Northern Ireland there is a very strong 'loyalty' factor to the school attended.
3. With changing demographics, schools have concerns about falling rolls and this has to a certain extent placed some schools in 'competition' with each other for pupil places. This may mitigate to the extent as to how far some schools may feel they could share and collaborate.
4. More beneficial if all participating schools share the one overall school site. By doing so you will greatly reduce potential transport, budgetary, supervision and timetabling issues.
5. Parental Support - It is essential that parents have totally bought into the proposed partnership and fully understand the process and intended learning outcomes. The process needs to be transparent.
6. Collaboration between schools attended mostly by children and young people from affluent backgrounds and schools attended mostly by young people from less affluent backgrounds may also present a challenge in terms of finding common ground.
7. Variability among schools in terms of educational outcomes may also present a barrier. For example, if there are two post-primary schools (either grammar or non-grammar) situated in the same locality, and one is a much 'higher achieving' school than the other, there may be a reluctance on the part of parents, teachers and senior management in the 'higher achieving' school for pupils from the two schools to learn together in case this has a detrimental impact on pupils' educational attainment.
8. Funding may be identified by schools and other establishments as a major factor affecting whether a school can establish or maintain a shared education initiative. Initiatives may be programme-funded and therefore may only have a certain lifespan, and schools may therefore have to find other avenues in order to maintain provision.

9. A number of practical considerations may mitigate against some schools fully engaging in shared education programmes/initiatives, for example:

- accountability for pupil outcomes;
- timetabling issues;
- travel time between schools;
- safety and transportation issues;
- parental consent;
- staff time and resources;
- some schools may perceive that other schools benefit more than they do;
- Staff time and resources.

2.3 Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of policy interventions and programmes.

Comment:

1. Significant work has already been undertaken in this area in identifying and analysing models of Shared Education, for example, 'Education and a Shared future. Options for sharing and collaboration in Northern Ireland schools.' (O'Sullivan, O'Flynn and Russell. <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/education-and-a-shared-future.pdf>). As a Board we recognise the implications of such reports for the support we provide to schools across all sectors.

2.4 Consider what priorities and actions need to be taken to improve sharing and integration – including the effectiveness of the relevant parts of the CRED policy; the need to engage more effectively with parents/carers; and the role of Special Schools.

Comment:

1. The Advancing Shared Education document (2013) states one of the values that stem from the definition of shared education is:

“An emphasis on developing the whole child so that they have a strong sense of their own identity and an understanding and respect for others and that they are able to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills to enable them to make a full and positive contribution to building a prosperous, open, diverse and inclusive society”.
2. This is closely related to the key objectives of the CRED policy (2011) which 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;

- 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.
3. The CRED policy advocates a long term, meaningful, cross-curricular approach to Community Relations, Equality and Diversity. While curricular areas such as PDMU, Local and Global Citizenship and Learning for Life and Work already provide a framework which enables teaching and learning relating to these areas to be examined and developed the CRED policy encourages all educational settings to recognise how others curricular areas such as History, World Around Us, Literacy, Music and The Arts can also complement and extend this learning.
 4. The delivery of training to Teachers, Youth Workers and Board of Governors has been a central element of this policy. This training ensures that staff has the knowledge, resources and confidence to develop the Policy within their school setting. Fundamental to the success will be the delivery of a platform of training programmes which ensure a co-ordinated approach which celebrates and learns from best practice. CRED is not currently embedded within initial teacher training however it would be important that is developed as we move forwards with any training relating to Shared Education or CRED.
 5. The further development of links with community groups, specialist organisations and parents/carers has been a key aspect of the CRED policy which is very closely embedded within the Shared Education philosophy.
 6. The CRED enhancement funding scheme has enabled schools to access resources to assist them to provide meaningful opportunities for groups of children and young people to engage with one another, develop their knowledge and skills and allow them to examine their values and beliefs. Shared Education will enable pupils to engage in learning in a shared classroom however a priority must still be given to ensuring children and young people have the opportunity to develop an understanding and appreciation of the diverse society existing in Northern Ireland. The allocation of additional funding and dedicated support officers to enable this is something which has proven beneficial as part of CRED and is worthy of consideration within the development of Shared Education.
 7. The CRED Policy is nearing the end of its initial 3 year business plan. While it is still essentially a recent policy which many schools and early years settings are still adapting to and developing it has resulted in large number of staff attending Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Training, the collection and development of support

resources, the allocation of funding and the celebration of examples of best practice. Future developments relating to both CRED and Shared Education may benefit from the establishment of policy links or shared practice.

8. There is a need to widen pupils' horizons and ways of thinking beyond local contexts. The development of cultural awareness, dialogue and understanding is of central importance in preparing young people for adult life. This could be achieved through a variety of approaches, for example, through the uptake of programmes such as Young Social Innovators www.youngsocialinnovators.org. There is a need to embed a global dimension in the curriculum as this should lead to school communities developing greater awareness of the wider world and less stereotypical views about others.