



**Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.**

**Shared/Integrated Education Inquiry.**

**Submission of Written Evidence to Northern Ireland Assembly –  
Committee for Education.**

**October 2014**

1. This evidence is being submitted on behalf of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

CCMS is the Managing Authority for all schools in the Catholic Maintained Sector of education in Northern Ireland. There are 754 Catholic Maintained schools – 32 nurseries, 641 Primary and 68 Post-Primary schools.

CCMS manages the employment of all teaching staff within the Catholic Maintained sector, a number in excess of 8500.

2. CCMS welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee for Education in order to inform its inquiry into Shared/Integrated Education and would wish to be considered to give oral evidence to the Committee.
3. There are 171,548 children in pre-school and primary school education in Northern Ireland.
  - 31.3% of children attending Controlled schools come from a Catholic or “no religion stated” background.
  - 3.3% of children attending Catholic schools are from a non-Catholic background.
  - While the Catholic/Protestant share in Integrated schools is roughly similar, 37.5% and 36.0% respectively, 26.5% of pupils indicated no religious background.

From these figures it could be concluded that there appears to be a greater readiness from the Catholic community to consider a primary school outside of their traditional sector.

4. The percentage of children from a background other than Catholic who attend a Catholic school does not reflect Catholic Education’s overall commitment to creating a society in which everyone is respected, irrespective of their cultural, social, ethnic or religious background.

This aspect of Catholic Education along with the high quality of education delivered in the majority of Catholic schools is however, demonstrating increasingly to the community at large that Catholic schools are for all and are not just “schools for Catholics.”

This is evident in a number of Catholic schools;

- School A in Belfast with an enrolment of 362 has 28% of pupils who come from a background other than Catholic.
- School B in a small seaside town with an enrolment of 53 has 69% of its pupils coming from a background other than Catholic.
- School C in a mid-sized town has an enrolment of 369 pupils, 69% of whom come from a background other than Catholic.

- School D, a large post-primary school of 601 pupils has 58% of pupils coming from a background other than Catholic.

The schools above are only a selection of schools which have a significant number of pupils from a background other than Catholic but they are nevertheless quite clearly and unapologetically Catholic in ethos and daily practice and are shining examples of integration, inclusion and diversity which has arisen *naturally* over a period of years.

5. In the post-primary sector, there are 143,973 pupils.

- 4.7% of children from a Catholic background attend Controlled schools.
- 2.5% of children in the Catholic Maintained sector come from a non-Catholic background.
- The Catholic/Protestant split in Integrated post-primary schools is again fairly even, 35% and 48% respectively with 17% indicating “no religion stated”.

It should be noted that more than 33% of children at post-primary stage go to schools of “other management types”. The continued existence of the Voluntary Grammar sector will invariably skew figures on the level of attendance at “non-traditional” schools by one sector of the community or another.

6. Of interest is the fact that, at primary level 18% and at post-primary level 12% of the school population goes to a school for reasons other than religious or other ethos. In that respect, albeit to a small degree, the education system in Northern Ireland is not as “segregated” as some commentators might suggest. In fact, the term segregation to describe the education system in Northern Ireland is incorrect given that segregation, according to the Oxford English Dictionary means;

***“enforced separation of racial groups in a community.”***

The principle of parental preference in the Northern Ireland Education system in no way implies and should not be understood as “enforced separation”.

7. According to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), 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 Education as an option within an educational system in which most children attend largely religiously separated schools began over 31 years ago. In that time,

Integrated schools have developed across the country to the point where today there are 62 schools at Nursery (3), Primary (38) and Post-Primary (21) level.

8. In recent years there has been a tendency for schools within the Controlled sector to transform to “Controlled Integrated” status. In many cases this situation has arisen because of the perceived threat to the future of the school because of the low enrolment.

An examination of the religious breakdown in a selection of ten Controlled schools which transformed to Controlled Integrated status results in some interesting statistics as outlined in the table below.

	<b>% from Protestant background</b>	<b>% from Catholic background</b>	<b>% stating no religion.</b>
<b>Pre-Transformation</b>	55.84%	17.25%	26.93%
<b>Post - transformation</b>	45.09%	30.39%	24.53%

When the schools transformed from Controlled to Controlled Integrated status, the percentage of children from a Protestant background or none fell while the percentage from a Catholic background increased.

Without further in-depth analysis it would be difficult to say why this is the case.

9. In total there are 315,521 children of school age in Northern Ireland. Of that number 21,745 or 6.89% attend Integrated schools at primary and post-primary level.

While NICIE may claim that through their Admissions Criteria Integrated Schools enroll approximately equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant children, as well as children from other religious and cultural backgrounds the fact remains that the number of Catholics attending *as a percentage of the overall Catholic school age population* is only 4.9%. The *percentage of the overall Protestant school age community* attending is only 8.1%.

Therefore, the overwhelming number of children attending Integrated schools indicated that they are of neither the Catholic or Protestant faith, are of other faiths or have no religious affiliation at all.

The figures above indicate that the intention of bringing “Catholic and Protestant” children together in one school has only partially succeeded. The many polls which continue to be conducted on public opinion towards Integrated Education and which appear to demonstrate “significant” support for Integrated schools do not in practice reflect that. Parental preference continues to be exerted along traditional lines, as parents continue to send their children to schools which are largely in keeping with their religious, cultural, social or other beliefs and traditions. Indeed, in many cases their choice

of school may be more to do with the quality of education or convenience rather than religious affiliation.

10. What are the factors then that have prevented Integrated Education from achieving its ultimate goal of creating a sector to “challenge” the existing Controlled, Catholic Maintained and Voluntary sectors? They are most likely the same factors that will challenge the development of Shared Education, namely;

A) The continuation of cultural and social division. There is no concept of shared identity in Northern Ireland with the community at large being divided along Unionist/Nationalist lines. Cultural identity and sectarianism remains rooted in communities, not schools. An unwritten policy of separation remains with the continued existence of “Peace Walls” across the city of Belfast and in other centres across Northern Ireland.

In June 2012, a piece of research funded by OFMDFM and carried out by the University of Ulster entitled “Attitudes to Peace Walls” provided a valuable insight into the attitudes of those who live in close proximity to peace walls as well as those from society in general. Among other things the report concluded that;

- 78% of the respondents in the survey believe that the segregation of communities is common in Northern Ireland even where there aren't any peace walls.
- 69% maintain peace walls are still necessary because of the potential for violence.
- 43% of Protestants compared to 20% of Catholics think peace walls protect their sense of identity.
- Catholics (40%) are more likely than Protestants (30%) to think there should be more opportunities for the two communities to come together to create the necessary conditions for the removal of the peace walls.

There are over 80 peace walls across Northern Ireland with the first being erected in 1969 in Cupar Way between the Falls and Shankill Roads. The Army Major over-seeing the construction of the wall at the time stated;

“This is a temporary measure, we do not want another Berlin Wall situation in western Europe. It will be gone by Christmas”.

B) Urban gentrification. The economic boom pre-2008 created opportunities for large sections of the community to move up the social and property ladder and a process of gentrification (intended or otherwise at a Government policy level) “created new layers of residential segregation in a city already preoccupied with ethno-religious territoriality”. ( B.Murtagh. Urban Studies 2011).

This alongside a lack of meaningful investment in areas such as North and West Belfast in particular and the political quarrel over, for example, housing as part of the Girdwood Barracks development resulted only in the continued stagnation and growth of many large, social housing developments which remain divided along sectarian lines.

The outcome? Those with the purchasing power, skills, transport and easy access to employment are “differentiated from those trapped in the single entity estates in the inner and outer city”. ( B.Murtagh. Urban Studies 2011).

- C) The issues of skills/skills deficit are perpetuated alongside the social division created by an education system which promotes inequality and social differences i.e. selective grammar schooling and the social class implication. Traditional industries have disappeared and given that such industries normally provided access to employment for a, predominantly, working class Protestant workforce without the overt need for education, that community now lags behind in terms of educational outcomes as the need for “education” was not something which was highly valued.

That being the case there is a need for an education system which provides and encourages access for all to high quality education which concentrates on the needs of society and provides young people with the skills and opportunities to meet those needs.

- D) Fear – The dominant communities have become even more polarized since the ‘Good Friday’ Agreement, especially at the working class level and perhaps to a more sanitized degree further up the socio-economic ladder.

11. CCMS would argue therefore that now is the time to consider the whole concept of Shared/Integrated Education in Northern Ireland in a different light and to look at alternative means of fulfilling the objective put before the TACOT:IE ( Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrated Education) Working Group in 1998, namely;

*“to examine ways in which all schools could contribute further to the promotion of a culture of tolerance as outlined in the Belfast Agreement.”*

As a starting point, CCMS would suggest that linguistically we should move away from the term Integrated Education and begin focusing on how schools can explore a spectrum of shared options based on educational provision and access rather than on a political or philosophical basis. The definition of Shared Education used by the QUB Centre for Shared Education is as good a starting point as any;

***“Shared Education is broadly defined as any collaborative activity within or between schools or other educational institutions that can: contribute towards school improvement, provide access to opportunity, encourage more effective use of resources, and promote social cohesion”***

11. CCMS also believes that after 30 years, the time has come for the Department to dispense with its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated education. If after 30 years the sector has grown to the point where it commands only 6.89% of the school age population in Northern Ireland, the Department should evaluate the public appetite for 'Integrated Education' as a sectoral entity, reconsider the 'statutory duty' and look to the promotion of other "initiatives" which have a greater chance of making more effective use of limited resources, promoting social cohesion and delivering on the general principles of TACOT:IT as outlined below;

- a. *It is a seminal purpose of the Northern Ireland Education Service to promote a culture of tolerance and reconciliation and, for schools, to do so in keeping with the particular ethos and circumstances within which they operate. These different approaches should be valued and all schools encouraged to provide further opportunities to promote a culture of tolerance.*
- b. *There should continue to be a pluralist approach to education, expressed in a plurality of structures (i.e. different types of school) and ethos.*
- c. *All schools should provide a pluralist curriculum promoting tolerance and mutual understanding.*
- d. *The present structure for schooling has been determined by parental wishes and, subject to the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils should continue to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.*
- e. *education policy, administration, school funding and school support should be fair and equitable to all grant-aided schools, i.e. controlled, voluntary, integrated, Irish-medium maintained, denominational, non-denominational, etc.*

(TACOT:IT June 1998)

12. The principles outlined in (8) above clearly focus on the fundamental obligation of Government to ensure that, within reason and recognising the Department's Sustainable Schools Policy and the principles of Area Based Planning, pupils continue to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents, recognizing that in a society which is truly committed to respecting diversity there can and should be an acceptance of diversity in the nature of education provision – Controlled, Catholic Maintained, Integrated, Irish Medium or other.

The existence of various forms of education, each espousing its own distinctive ethos, is evident throughout the world as is the recognition that where change is deemed to be necessary it can be brought about while maintaining respect for each individual education sector or provider.

This has been delivered in many places across the world through the concept of Shared Education and Shared Campuses.

13. There have been and continue to be many examples of Shared Education in Northern Ireland which have developed from agreed local need or practices and through the EMU

and CRED programmes. The Centre for Shared Education in QUB has involved over 7000 students in various shared programmes and the CREDIT - Classrooms Re-imagined: Education in Diversity and Inclusion for Teachers - programme which was delivered jointly by St Mary's University College and Stramillis University College brought together teachers from all sectors with the aim of enabling them to develop skills and confidence with issues of division, diversity, inclusion and community cohesion in the classroom and on a whole school basis.

In recent months the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced the Shared Campus Programme and the first successful projects have only just been approved. As these projects move forward the potential will grow for a range of sharing options, from limited curriculum interaction to shared governance.

This is a very exciting development in education delivery in Northern Ireland and one which has been evident in other countries for some time. We should endeavor to learn what we can from them in order to ensure success in our own endeavors.

14. In the United States of America, Shared Campuses have been the norm for many years. In New York, of the city's 1500 schools, about 600 are shared campuses. Supporters of the shared campus model argue that they increase the number of academic offerings, develop appropriate school sizes and more effectively use the available school buildings.

In one instance a school of 280 students shares a building with a 630 pupil school. A doorway serves as the "boundary" between one school and the other. There are of course hurdles to overcome but the arrangement is "overwhelmingly" successful.

Each school can retain its own distinctive ethos;

*"School A's students wear uniforms, walk in single file and remain in school until 5pm. The walls are adorned with murals of classic book covers and inspirational messages. School B's hallways are barren and painted uniformly yellow and its students are gone from the building by 3pm. Seven years ago it was considered among the worst schools in the city of New York. Now it's achieving a Grade B on the city's progress report".*

The keys to success are meeting the needs of pupils in different ways, sharing instructional practices, students working inside each other's classrooms learning from and understanding each other, developing relationships and respecting the existence of each other's school.

Such has been the success of the New York venture that other cities across the USA like Chicago and Denver are moving in the same direction.

15. Closer to home and in an environment more akin to our own is Scotland. In recent years, several local Council areas have developed shared campus options in an effort to ensure that different sectors have retained an educational presence in particular areas while



ensuring access to a full-educational experience. The arrangements invariably involve collaboration between Catholic and non-denominational schools. In some cases the Catholic school is the larger partner and in others the non-denominational school. Midlothian, Argyll & Bute and North Lanarkshire Councils are among those which have taken this route. In the case of North Lanarkshire the rationale for the development of the Shared Campus design is;

*“ based on financial and best value consideration. The building of schools with shared infrastructure generates savings and as a result more schools can be built or refurbished from the available resources. In addition, the model reduces the need to close small schools, particularly in rural areas, and enables the community to access greatly enhanced facilities”*.(North Lanarkshire Protocol for Management of a Shared Campus)

While “financial and best value considerations” were to the fore, the parties concerned underlined their *“commitment to the preservation, development and respect for the identity and distinctiveness of each school.”* The Council went one step further and emphasized that it was *“unequivocally committed to Catholic education”*.

All aspects of the Shared Campus arrangement were outlined in a management protocol; from respect for individual school identity and ethos through leadership, collaboration, communication right down to timetabling for use of the various shared facilities.

16. In 2008 North Lanarkshire Council commissioned an independent evaluation of Shared Campus schools within the District Council area. For the most part the findings were very positive in tone;

- It was the almost unanimous view of head teachers and staff that the shared campus environment had in no way impaired the traditional link between the individual school and the chaplain or the local church(es).
- The smaller school is treated as an equal partner in the shared campus arrangement.
- The protocol has played a significant role in the development of the shared campus model in North Lanarkshire.
- The implementation of the authority protocol for the operation of joint campuses had generated no difficulties for head teachers.
- Managing in a shared campus context is considered by head teachers to be more complex than managing in a single school environment.
- Pupils consider the best feature of sharing a campus with another school is the opportunity to meet more people and make more friends.
- The main pupil dislikes about their new environments have to do with noisy and cramped teaching/learning conditions and dining areas.
- There was almost unanimous support from staff, pupils and parents that the staff and pupils of the schools on a shared campus site show respect and good manners to each other.
- Relationships between staff and pupils of shared campus schools appear for the most part to be positive, solidly grounded and free from denominational tensions.

- Parents perceive the main benefit of sharing a campus to be associated with providing opportunities for children in the local area to travel to school together and to interact socially in their new environment.
- Between 85-90% of parents rated the quality of the educational experience being received by their children in a shared campus environment as very good or good, with no parents rating it unsatisfactory.

It is clear therefore from the experiences in Scotland that under certain circumstances and with the appropriate level of commitment, preparation and planning, a shared campus arrangement can work.

17. Of course, not everyone is at a stage where a shared campus would be a viable option. In those cases where it is hoped to develop such arrangements there is a long history of collaboration between the schools involved. This however does not prevent the development of sharing and the Department should consider how it can facilitate a range of potential options from the very low to very high level, for example;

- Extending the concept of the 'Area Learning Community' to include all phases of education and to use this vehicle as the principal portal for continuous professional development of staff.
- Putting greater emphasis on EMU/CRED activity being a key element of the curriculum in each year of a child's time in school.
- Encouraging joint curriculum development days, especially between the staff of small schools where considerable responsibility for several areas of staff development is placed on the shoulders of a small number of staff.
- Where one school cannot afford to employ additional staff, options for employment of staff across more than one school should be explored, especially in specialist areas such as music, art, physical education. The recent signature project which saw the employment of additional teachers in schools could be developed along these lines.
- Encourage schools to collaborate more fully in providing children with extra-curricular activities.
- Joint activities/curriculum workshops for parents across a number of schools.

18. It will not, however, be easy to develop an agreed approach to sharing while the education system in Northern Ireland remains in a state of uncertainty and confusion. The Department must take affirmative action to ensure that the climate across all sectors is conducive to the promotion of shared education. CCMS would suggest that priorities for action should include;

- Promoting, as far as is possible, a 'social balance' in schools;
- Ending selection in reality and legislating against anything which perpetuates academic and/or social selection;
- Ensuring equality of access for all based on agreed and enforceable criteria;

- Recognising diversity of provision and the principle of parental preference and moving away from a “duty” to promote Integrated Education;
- Creating a multi-sectoral, equal system for all then exploring how “sharing” might be facilitated.

It must be recognised that integration/sharing/shared education cannot be enforced; it must develop naturally from the bottom up and in a range of different guises. The responsibility for this cannot be left to schools alone and while schools do have a key part to play, integration throughout society has to be a reality and the norm, if we are to work collaboratively to resolve the problems which Northern Ireland continues to face.

19. In conclusion, CCMS believes that an integrated, shared system of education for Northern Ireland is achievable but it has to develop in a society which is mature to the point where individual and distinct sectors are recognized and valued for the contribution they make to a shared society.

CCMS and Catholic Education have consistently demonstrated its willingness to be part of that shared, education system. From as far back as 2001, the Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland ( Building Peace Shaping the Future) were promoting the very strong message that Catholic schools, in living out their philosophy and ethos, are obliged to;

- Provide friendly contacts between pupils of different characters and backgrounds in order to encourage mutual understanding;
- Assist society to move beyond its deeply-ingrained divisions into a new coherence and openness to the world at large;
- Promote reconciliation and the common good;
- Recognize that the attendance at our schools of children from other denominations and none is an enrichment of the education experience offered by the school and is seen as a practical expression of the commitment to inclusivity.

CCMS and Catholic schools recognize that it is only in partnership that Northern Ireland will achieve the peace and reconciliation that all its people deserve. We cannot do that alone and stand ready to face the challenges of working with others across all sectors of Education and beyond to achieve the goal we all desire, a society in which we can live and work together in peace and harmony, not only accepting but cherishing difference.

