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### **Background Paper**

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014

**Subject: Background on the Fund's investment in Shared Education**

#### **1.0 Summary**

In Northern Ireland, 93% of pupils are educated in separate schools. There many different types of school, each proud of their identity and ethos and which parents and communities value and care about passionately.

The accepted system of having children educated separately runs counter to the International Fund for Ireland's objective of bringing people and communities together and since 2007, shared education models, sponsored by the Fund and Atlantic Philanthropies, have brought together schools from different sectors in strategic partnerships.

These models have sought to make the case for sharing and provide a diverse range of approaches that enhance academic and personal development and good relations between communities.

In building a more cohesive society, shared education and integrated education are different routes to the same objective. However, communities have genuine concerns about the potential loss of school identity and ethos should they merge into or be replaced by new integrated schools.

The Fund's investment has made the case for shared education and outlined its potential to be a practical and achievable way for all schools to retain identities, respect difference and build relationships between local communities.

These models of shared education have demonstrated that schools can find and develop innovative solutions to deliver education on a cross-sectoral basis. They provide effective ways of breaking down the barriers arising from our historic conflict by providing a range of opportunities for young people to learn together and reach the highest possible standards of educational achievement.

In October 2013, the Northern Ireland Education Minister, John O'Dowd MLA, recognised the Fund's contribution and signalled his intention to provide a legislative requirement for sharing and called for "sharing to become the accepted reality at every stage of education, from early years to post-graduate study" (Address to the Northern Ireland Assembly, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013).

## **2.0 About Shared Education**

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 co-ordinated timetabling and pupils taking classes across a network of schools. It looks to work within the current system to promote opportunities for sustained curriculum based contact between pupils across the sectoral divide.

The focus of Shared Education is delivering core curriculum activities where teachers and pupils work together across schools to achieve higher quality educational experiences.

## **3.0 The Fund's contribution to Shared Education**

The Fund has invested significantly in shared education. Since 2007, it has funded 22 projects (£18m) to facilitate reconciliation for a shared future through the medium of education in order to:

- promote shared education by linking schools representative of the two communities;

- build on community relations within and between schools;
- support cultural outreach amongst young people representative of the differing communities/traditions; and
- address strategic gaps in achieving reconciliation through a cross- community, cross-border approach through education and the related services sector.

Some 19 of these projects constitute the Sharing in Education Programme (SiEP) and the remaining three form the Shared Education Programme (SEP) operated through: Queen's University, the Northern Eastern Education and Library Board (PIEE), and the Fermanagh Trust. The latter three projects are co-funded with Atlantic Philanthropies.

The strategic relationship between the Fund and AP has led to a total investment of more than **£24 million (Fund £18m and AP £6m)** in 22 shared education projects.

#### **4.0 Achievements**

Over six years, the Fund in collaboration with AP has made the case for shared education and achieved much.

- (a) Outworkings from the Sharing in Education Programme provided a proven and credible evidence base for discussions between educationalists and government which helped shape commitments in the Programme for Government (PfG: 2011-2015) for shared education, viz:
  - (i) Establish a Ministerial Advisory Group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education.
  - (ii) To ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015.
  - (iii) To substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.
  
- (b) A June 2013 announcement by the First and Deputy First Ministers (***Together: Building a United Community***) stated that work on 10+ shared education campuses will commence within the next five years, offering the potential for shared classes and subjects and also adding significant momentum to the PfG

commitments. They also confirmed plans to provide more opportunities for sharing within teacher training to build on initiatives underway involving the two teacher training colleges. SiEP has already made considerable gains in this area.

- (c) In May 2013 the Ministerial Advisory Group's (MAG) final report referenced the 'laudable' examples from SiEP as it put forward 17 recommendations on advancing shared education which the Fund supports. Three of which, if implemented, will move shared education from an external intervention to the mainstream, viz:
- (i) Statutory duty on the Department of Education and the new Education and Skills Authority to encourage and facilitate shared education.
  - (ii) A central unit within ESA to take lead responsibility on developing and driving forward a strategy on advancing shared education.
  - (iii) A shared education premium is incorporated as part of the revised funding formula for schools and other educational institutions.
- (d) On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2013, the Northern Ireland Education Minister, John O'Dowd MLA, responded to the Ministerial Advisory Group recommendations and outlined the way forward for shared education.

The Minister signalled his general acceptance to proposals around the mainstreaming of funding for shared education and committed to bring forward a statutory definition of shared education in the Education Bill and provisions to ensure the Education and Skills Authority would have a duty to encourage and facilitate it.

- (e) The Minister said: "*Shared education is rolling out as we speak. I would like to see a legal definition put in place through the ESA Bill. However, if the ESA continues to be delayed, I will consider bringing forward legislation to introduce a definition of shared education separate from the ESA Bill, as I place such importance on it.*"

- (f) Speaking at the Sharing in Education Programme Final Conference in November 2013, the Minister outlined the challenges to ending separation in schools and said:

*“[SIEP] projects represented at today’s conference, supported by the Fund, have together addressed many of these challenges. Together they provide real and tangible evidence to support the case for Shared Education.*

*“Hence the education aspects of the Fund’s work is of significant importance as we in government seek to advance shared education. I commend the Fund on their vision to invest in this work and one which has made a real, and lasting, difference to the young people who have undoubtedly benefited.”*

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The Fund has played a key role in moving shared education from an embryonic working concept towards maturity and the point where it can become a mainstreamed aspect within the Department of Education and a part of education delivery in every classroom in Northern Ireland.