

Report from Integrated Schools Youth Parliament

Stormont Hotel

3rd December 2014




 **nicie**
NORTHERN IRELAND LEADERSHIP FOR
INTEGRATED EDUCATION
hosts

STUDENT PARLIAMENT

In response to the Education Inquiry
into Shared **AND** Integrated Education

WHERE?
Stormont
Hotel
Belfast

WHEN?
Wednesday
3rd December
10am – 2.30pm



HAVE YOUR SAY! #EducateUsTogether



Report from Integrated Schools Youth Parliament Stormont Hotel 3rd December 2014

On Wednesday 3rd December 2014, over 90 students from 30 integrated schools came together in the Stormont Hotel, to discuss integrated and shared education in the light of the Education Committee inquiry. Young people, ranging from years 6,7,10 and post 16 mixed in groups to explore the various elements in the consultation. This was a dynamic event that enabled the young people to think critically about integrated education and discuss and debate the key issues. Through discussion and drama they explored the various themes of the inquiry and presented them as drama tableaux. They also captured their thoughts and discussions on flip charts. Below is a report, drawing on these workshops, of what young people in integrated schools think about integrated and shared education,

The following comments were gathered in response to several questions posed to the young people.

- 1) What do you think are the main differences between integrated and shared education?
- 2) What things make it difficult to have more integrated education?
- 3) What things would make it easier to have more integrated education?
- 4) What things would make it difficult to have shared education?
- 5) What things would make it easier to have more shared education?
- 6) What three things do you think the government should know so that more young people can have integrated education?





The thoughts that were drawn out from these discussions about integrated education (IE) are:

Characteristics:

- IE is about co-operation and joining young people together. It promotes understanding, equality, respect and strength and helps to break down walls and therefore helps to promote young people's rights. The voice of young people is not only heard in IE but others also listen and it matters what is said.
- IE is non-judgmental, fair, comforting, diverse, innovative, accepting, inclusive, welcoming, educational, valued, offers religious understanding and promotes freedom.
- IE is good because although everyone is different everyone is included and learning happens about the different religions automatically and in a friendly and safe environment. Also there are more opportunities to learn other languages, play other sports and experience different types of music.
- IE celebrates both differences and similarities.
- IE promotes acceptance of other minority cultures both in and out of school. Children and young people have the opportunity and feel comfortable to develop lasting friendships outside of school and embrace cultural traditions eg foods, customs, festivals etc. Also the young people can feel comfortable expressing their culture and learn to accept others for who they are and not by their religion.
- Some young people also felt that IE was confidence building as they felt cared for and welcomed in a non-judgmental environment.



Employment:

- IE is the only way to prepare young people for the reality of employment and working with all kinds of different people. If you do not teach young people and children together how do you expect them to work together as adults.
- Young people will be able to accept and respect other employees of different backgrounds and work alongside them with no issues.

Political:

- Children and young people from the IE sector are more likely to have a positive impact as potential politicians of the future.
- IE is important as the young people involved can help to abolish the negative view of IE schools.

Barriers to IE:

- It should not just rest on the shoulders' of young people to promote integrated education - parents and others should also be involved.
- It was mentioned that adults need to take the lead from children and young people in relation to IE.
- Although some adults may not be aware of the need of IE children and young people are very comfortable with IE and feel that we need to use education as a tool to move Northern Ireland on from the past rather than live in the past.
- Other difficulties mentioned were language barriers, opinions of parents, not enough funding, and location of schools.

Shared Education:

The main points about shared education were:

- One group felt that it was a mistake to think that shared education was a permanent solution
- The sharing of facilities on a single campus only entrenches sectarianism in a form of benign apartheid
- Shared education is still segregated as pupils are still separated and only come together sometimes
- Some pupils described negative experiences of shared education and felt that education should not be competitive.
- It was felt that Shared Education does not embrace other cultures and that sharing lessons a predominately single identity school makes students feel like a visitor. IE welcome a wide range of opinions and viewpoints.
- Proper planning needs to take place to enable shared programmes to be beneficial and effective.
- Some felt that Shared Education was limited, ordinary, unfair, subdivided, secluded, boring, usual, and dreary.



Advice to Government:

The young people wanted to tell the MLAs:

- To listen to their opinions and give them more opportunities to speak to them.
- To recognise the work of Integrated Education and the work that is done in their schools.



NICIE would like to thank Peter McCallion for all his support and advice in the preparation of the event. We would also like to thank Michelle McIlveen, Sandra Overend and Robin Newton for taking time out of their busy schedules to spend some time with the young people and to listen to what they had to say.