

**NORTHERN IRELAND
COUNCIL FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION**



**SUBMISSION
TO THE INQUIRY INTO
SHARED AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION**



October 2014

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into shared and integrated education.

At the outset we remind the committee of the unequivocal declaration given to integrated education in the Education Reform Order (NI) 1989 and the Good Friday Agreement 1998, both of which require that it is for the government to ‘encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education’. It is important also to note that the Good Friday Agreement was supported by over 75% of the population *in its entirety* and although many difficult and controversial elements involving change were contained within, and despite later attempts by dissident voices to ‘cherry-pick’ at the agreement, it remains intact today, a basis on which to build a more equal, more peaceful and more forward looking Northern Ireland.

The statutory duty of government was also recently affirmed by Lord Justice Treacy in May 2014 in a judicial review initiated by Drumragh Integrated College. Referring to Article 64 of the ERO(NI) 1989 he made it clear that integrated education ‘is a stand alone concept, that is to say the education together at school of protestant and roman catholic pupils... as opposed to integration within school of any other distinct sets of pupils... integrated education must be the service of imparting knowledge to young people from all backgrounds as equals’. And he continued: ‘a school which has a predominantly catholic or predominantly protestant ethos... cannot be said to be delivering integrated education... because as part of its constitution as an institution it is fundamentally oriented to one religious cannon over another... The integrated education referred to in the article is education that is integrated throughout and not education that is delivered by a partisan board... The Department needs to be alive to the A64 duty at all levels.’

It is generally acknowledged that our present segregated system of education is not sustainable. It does not promote social cohesion, it reinforces the notion of the ‘other’ and separation, it increases social segregation and it fails a significant number of children. It is not preparing our young people for a rapidly changing and uncertain future. The duplication and triplicating of resources is

expensive; in this era of austerity we cannot justify the use of constrained resources to prioritise the maintenance of vested interests over the educational needs of our young people. The status quo is not tenable. This inquiry provides an opportunity to advance solutions which will support the reform of this system.

NICIE identifies below solutions and innovative approaches which would contribute to such a reform and which would enable Northern Ireland to move beyond a segregated education system to a cohesive system of education which will reflect and shape our changing society.

Recommendations for change

- We call on DE to actively implement Article 64 to encourage and facilitate integrated education and to show public commitment to doing so by including representation for integrated education on the proposed single board.
- We call on DE to guarantee equality of planning for integrated education. There is no central mechanism for either testing parental demand for integrated education or for planning for it. This failure in planning discriminates against parents seeking an integrated school since it is they who must prove sufficient demand before a school may be established.
- The duties of the new single board should clarify both its obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education and its responsibility to plan for such education.
- Through area based planning and meaningful consultation with parents, DE must ensure there is equality of choice in every area, including the choice of integrated schooling.
- We call for the decoupling of pre-school provision from sectoral management and an end to the segregation of children in their formative years.

- The role of special schools in providing an inclusive and fully integrated education should be recognised.
- NICIE calls on the committee to endorse its initiative *Positive Partnerships for Integration*, an initiative which will allow all schools to recognise the diversity which exists in each classroom.
- NICIE calls on courageous decisive action to follow the recommendations in the International Review Panel on Teacher Education in Northern Ireland among which is the recommendation to establish one inclusive centre of excellence to train our young teachers to help build a united and prosperous community.
- NICIE calls for a clear and unambiguous definition of shared education. The model of integrated education should be explicitly referred to in any reference to and definition of shared education, consistent with DE policy which views shared education as a journey to an integrated system of education. All funding and resourcing of shared education should be equally open to integrated education and its schools.
- NICIE calls for the establishment of a Patten style inquiry into education in Northern Ireland.

Support for integrated education

The duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education was written into the Education Order 1989 and was copper-fastened in the Good Friday Agreement in recognition of the positive role this model of education could play in inoculating against sectarianism, supporting peace and building a cohesive society.

Over thirty years, forty integrated schools were founded by groups of pioneering parents who wished that their children be educated together irrespective of faith, background, ethnicity, or ability level. Another twenty two schools transformed to integrated status. The founders of integrated education believed that the divisions which had ignited the ‘troubles’ could only be removed by giving young people from different backgrounds and cultures opportunities to learn together on a daily basis, in a safe environment, where difference is recognised, understood and valued.

In integrated schools each child is nurtured in the values of their own ethnic, religious and cultural background in such a way that their own faith is not diminished and their understanding of other beliefs is enhanced. In a planned way children are encouraged to take pride in and celebrate their own cultural and religious identities and to learn about and respect the diverse identities of their classmates. Staff facilitate programmes and learning experiences that give young people opportunities to confront contentious issues; events and dates that are important for all members of the school community are explored and respected. Each school provides cultural experiences according to the diversity of the school community. The planned integrated experience ensures that every child is equipped to live and work in an increasingly diverse world.

In 2014, almost 22,000 young people attend sixty two integrated nursery, primary and post-primary schools and colleges, while a further 700 children who apply are turned away annually because of insufficient places.

The continuing highly segregated nature of housing and education is well documented and its symbolic continuance, a sign of lack of progress towards a more confident and outward-looking society, commented on. Over ninety per cent of our children continue to be educated at single identity schools, often returning to equally divided residential areas. The gap in achievement levels involving our students has increased while evidence mounts of the correlation between social deprivation and underachievement. (Four in ten of our children are leaving school without the minimum five GCSE passes at grade A–C, a key employability qualification.) Factors of gender and religion also contribute to disparate outcomes among pupils. The selection issue remains unresolved and in that vacuum has emerged a ‘catholic’ and a ‘protestant’ selection test. Racist incidents against our newcomer community are an almost daily occurrence. All this is set against a backdrop of political stalemate and economic austerity.

The case and need for integrated education remains.

NICIE argues that active implementation of Article 64 would disseminate more widely awareness of and demand for integrated education. This implementation should find expression at the operational level as identified in the recent judicial review where the weakness of area based planning was highlighted as a potential blocker to the expansion of integrated education. Inclusion of representation for integrated education on this new board is central to demonstrating strategic commitment to Article 64.

Planning for integrated provision

The greatest barrier to the expansion of integrated education lies in the discriminatory and unequal approach to planning. CCMS has a statutory duty to plan for the provision of catholic schools. The ELBs, under the 1986 Education Order, have a duty to plan for sufficient schools of different character in their areas. They choose to interpret this as planning for controlled schools and do not accept that they have a role in planning for integrated education. Parents seeking a catholic or controlled school will have a choice from a number of such schools in any area. Parents seeking an integrated school are expected to plan this provision themselves and to provide evidence of need. NICIE has an important function in supporting such parents but has no statutory planning remit. Furthermore, the funding mechanism which existed in the past to support the development of integrated schools has been discontinued.

The process of area based planning has exacerbated the situation, with ELBs and CCMS planning for their own sectors. No consideration is given to whether or not an integrated choice should be considered and parents are not consulted on such a possibility. This is despite the evidence of all polls which show strong parental preference for integrated education. According to polls, support for integrated education remains consistently high. Seventy seven per cent of parents in the most recent Millard and Brown survey indicated they would support a request for their child's school to become integrated.

A new single ELB is now being legislated for. It is critical that the new education bill clarifies the responsibility of this board in relation to how at an operational level Article 64 is implemented and that a clear responsibility is imposed on the single board to plan for integrated education.

Pre-school provision

Prof Paul Connolly, in his seminal research evidence, confirms how children from the age of three can demonstrate awareness of ‘communal symbols’ and prejudicial attitudes. DE policy insists that pre-school provision is non-sectoral but this is not reflected in reality. Nursery units are linked to single identity primary school and so children are channeled into our divided system from this early age. The time has come to change this. DE can do so simply by ensuring that funding for pre-school provision goes only to those settings which are welcoming to all and clearly non denominational (and can show evidence of being such). Such an easily attained and non controversial step would play a significant role in the desegregation of our educational system.

Special schools

The role of special schools in providing an inclusive and fully integrated education is rarely recognised. Special schools are open to children from all backgrounds irrespective of religious affiliation, socio-economic status, ethnicity, etc. and are undoubtedly examples of integrated education in practice. It can be argued that the failure to recognise the integrated nature of special schools further marginalises these schools. NICIE argues that special schools should be allowed to be officially recognised as integrated and we call for the legal barrier preventing this to be rescinded. In doing so we endorse the stance taken by Tor Bank Special school in its submission to this inquiry.

Moving beyond segregation to a cohesive system of education:

Positive Partnerships for Integration

NICIE is fully appreciative of the quality education offered in all types of schools. We are also sensitive to the historic reasons for our divided educational system and to the emotional connection between schools and the communities they serve. NICIE is committed to meaningful parental choice.

We note that real choice for many parents is often constrained by such factors as finance or geographical location, and that parents choose a school for a variety of reasons including reputation, family ties or tradition. We acknowledge the principle of parental choice and, in so doing, acknowledge the right of parents to seek faith-based provision. This range of choice should be accommodated in a cohesive system of education, rather than being used as a prop to maintain a segregated system. Such a cohesive system would include single identity and faith schools, and schools integrated both by legal status and by being recognised as having an integrated ethos. All schools would be committed to inclusive and shared education, with children in single identity schools guaranteed sustained and meaningful shared learning.

Moreover, we argue that our traditional sectors do not reflect our changing society. We argue that despite the badges of school type, every school includes a diversity of children and young people: children from mixed marriages; children from different faiths and ethnicities; children from secular backgrounds as well as those from the main traditions; children of different abilities and with different talents. We contend that we do a disservice to all children if we assume they are the same because of the type of school attended. We argue that children learn best when they feel fully accepted.

For that reason NICIE calls on the committee to endorse our initiative, *Positive Partnerships for Integration*, an initiative which will allow all schools to accept difference, to challenge division and to celebrate the diversity which exists in each classroom. This school-driven process will allow

schools, through partnerships, to move from a dominant or partisan ethos to one of equality of respect for all, and will facilitate change in the lived experience of the children without necessitating a change in managing authority. This process has been developed after many months of careful consultation with stakeholders. PPInt hopes to deliver benefits to all schools involved by enabling an audit of current provision for diversity and inclusion and identify opportunities for future development. NICIE calls on this inquiry to recommend that DE supports this initiative.

NICIE emphasises the importance of preparation of teachers to support such diverse and inclusive learning environments and calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the panel on initial teacher education.

Shared education

NICIE recognises the positive involvement of many schools in the various shared education initiatives and the benefits that accrue from this. All integrated colleges play a positive role in their local area learning communities. Three integrated colleges submitted proposals for shared campuses and were disappointed when these bids were not successful. Other colleges have taken a lead in shared education partnerships. NICIE, funded by IFI, trained more than 600 teachers to maximise outcomes in shared classrooms through our *Shared Classrooms: Deepening Learning* project.

NICIE supports the concept of shared education where it is based on the imperative of building community relations through connecting children and young people and, through them, families and communities.

Integrated schools from their formation have involved the coming together of parents, carers and local communities and they continue to offer strong effective channels for their participation in the running of the schools. The sixty two integrated schools across Northern Ireland offer a powerful model of daily sharing in practice. The model of integrated education therefore should be explicitly

referred to in any reference to shared education, consistent with DE policy which views shared education as a journey to an integrated system of education. Such a move would ensure a fairer allocation of funding and resourcing.

Integrated education by its very title implies sharing. However, we are concerned that the lack of clarity surrounding the concept 'shared education' allows for partisan use of the term and potentially undermines the good intention of its origin.

We are concerned that this developing concept involves an acceptance of a religiously divided system which 'tries to make the walls more porous' (PMR 1 2012). Such an approach to diversity and pluralism is at odds with European thinking and social science research on how to progress intercultural dialogue.

NICIE's concern is that shared education is used as an alternative to rather than a tool for change. A clarity of definition is urgently required, not least because of the £70 million funding which is going to be made available to shared education projects over the next five years.

A recent survey published in the Belfast Telegraph found a clear understanding and support for integrated education with shared education understood as a completely different concept. DE in a recent submission to the education committee was very clear that integrated education was at the upper end of the continuum of sharing. This should be made explicit in the definitive definition of shared education.

This definition of shared education should focus on its role as a tool for reconciliation. A poorly defined and poorly understood concept may simply provide a fig leaf of respectability to our segregated system. Properly defined and with bench marks for assuring high quality outcomes, shared education will permit single identity/faith schools to play their part in building reconciliation and will support the creation of a cohesive system of education.

Conclusion

The Peace Monitoring report of 2014 (P137) referred to the current ‘backsliding’, ‘where peace often fails to bring the prosperity that might give it lasting value to all sides... where integration is postponed indefinitely... and when constant work and constant compromise is required’. To wait until more wider societal change occurs before tackling the issue of desegregating our system of education is to deny yet another generation of the proven outcomes of a more cohesive community. It required courage and commitment to deliver change in reform of policing and the prison service as laid down in the Good Friday agreement. That same courage and commitment is now demanded to deliver on other aspects of that same agreement, not least on integrated education. For this reason NICIE argues that our educational system should not be ring fenced from change but should be the subject of an independent review to guide reform.

Integrated education is premised on the belief that education is capable of transforming society, capable of shaping and leading rather than simply reflecting and maintaining the legacy of division; this is a view widely shared throughout the globe. In its opening paragraphs the most recent Peace Monitoring Report (2014) states: ‘The peace process in Northern Ireland has lost the power to inspire... without a vision of shared society to sustain it.’

To many international observers a major key towards effecting change is the desegregation of our schools. In September this year Nancy Soderberg, former senior aide to President Clinton, commented: ‘good leaders in Northern Ireland would... build the best schools which are no longer segregated’, while President Obama on his last visit to Belfast commented: ‘issues like segregated schools and housing... symbols of history that are a source of pride for some and pain for others... these are not tangential to peace, they are essential to it... if catholics and protestants have their schools... if we can’t see ourselves in one another, if fear and resentment are allowed to harden, that encourages division, it discourages cooperation.’

The NICIE vision sees education leading society into a new era rather than simply reflecting an

unchanging legacy. Our model of integrated schools is much admired abroad and has been instrumental in the creation of new systems of schooling in other post-conflict and ethnically divided societies such as Bosnia, Macedonia, and Turkey. There is a significant body of research highlighting the positive impacts of integrated education on those who come through these schools.

We look towards other systems of high standard, all embracing education such as that of Finland and we welcome the progress of organisations such as Education Together as it establishes an alternative system of schooling in the Republic of Ireland responding to the demands of a more diverse and plural society.

NICIE welcomes this inquiry into our approaches to integration and sharing and applauds the committee for undertaking this important piece of work.