

## SHARED AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION INQUIRY



### NORTHERN IRELAND COUNCIL FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Prior to the presentation by NICIE to the education committee on November 19, we wish to submit the following additional evidence:

- response to issues raised in submissions of CCMS and NICCE;
- moving beyond segregation to an integrated or unified system of education.

#### **Definitions of integrated education**

Integrated education is a model of education developed by parents in response to the divisive system of education that existed in the 1970s. At a time of serious conflict, these parents wished to see their children educated together. They believed that, by this simple process, hostility and fear would be reduced, mutual respect and understanding would be increased and the seeds of a more peaceful society would be sown. They sought to model within the school walls the type of society they wished to see: one characterised by respect for difference, by celebration of diversity, by democratic engagement with division. To this end, it was important to ensure a balance of both traditions at all levels of school life, from governors, through to staff and students. It was important to ensure that the culture of both major traditions and others were celebrated openly. It was important that the individual child felt accepted and cherished for who she was, and was not labelled with a single unchanging identity. Integrated education is method of education which is inclusive, it is sharing as the norm on a daily basis.

Shared education is a concept which has developed as a means of connecting children across the divide. It has a number of different definitions, ranging from educational through economic to cross community building. It is critical that an agreed definition, based on the promotion of good relations is settled upon.

### **Parental choice**

NICIE fully accepts the principle of parental choice.

We argue that choice of parents for a particular type of school in Northern Ireland is limited by our historical and traditional differences and divisions; our parallel system of education is indeed a ‘regrettable remnant of historic ethno-political divisions in our society’. Choice is often determined by the geography and the demographic mix in an area. Managing authorities work on the presumption that parents choose schools on the basis of their religious background and plan accordingly. The evidence from integrated education suggests otherwise. A recent public opinion survey by NICIE in the BELB area found that faith-based ethos was important for only 27% of primary school parents.

We also note that, where schools are oversubscribed, parental choice is denied.

### **Segregation or an integrated system?**

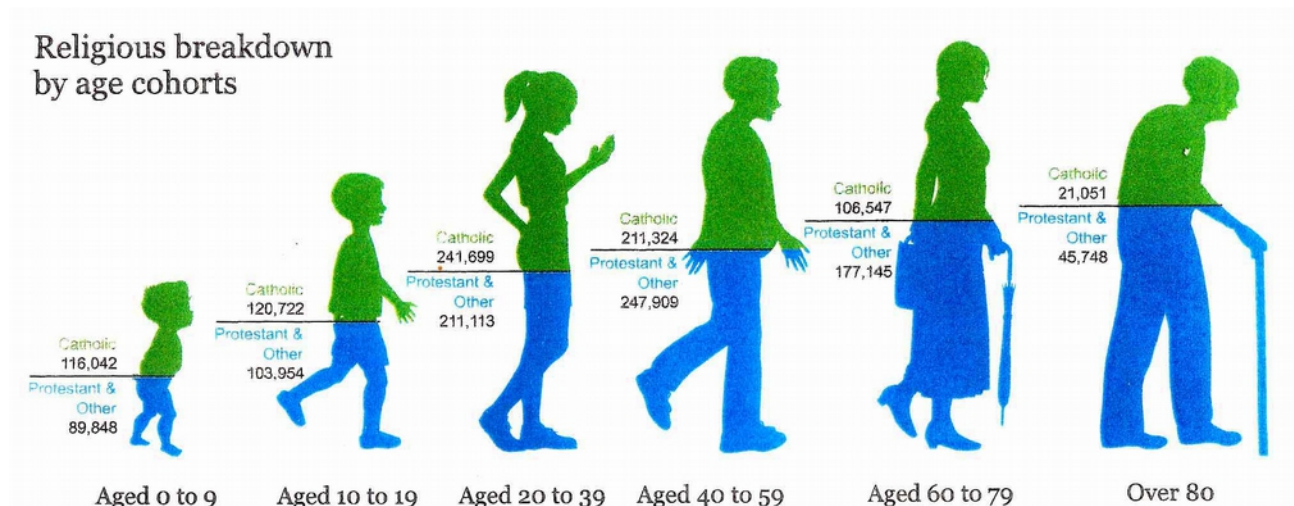
We accept that ‘diversity of provision in education is the hallmark of, not an obstacle to a normal, diverse, pluralist society’. However, Northern Ireland is not yet a normal, diverse and pluralist society. The submission from CCMS provides compelling evidence of continuing division. NICIE argues that our educational system has a key role to play in shaping such a diverse and pluralist society, moving us beyond a ‘shared out’ society to one which is shared. We argue that no one

sector can be a barrier to change. We argue that an independent analysis should be held into the impact our segregated system has on perpetuating divisions and the concept of the ‘other’. For this reason we have called for a Patten-style inquiry into education.

We chose the word ‘segregated’ to describe our system, based on the main definition of the Oxford English dictionary: *the action or state of setting someone or something apart from others*. Where 92% of children are educated separately on the basis of perceived religious background, such a use of the word is measured. We further note that the wider world, including politicians and academics, characterise our education system as segregated, as indeed do the general public. That is why leading international visitors choose to visit integrated schools rather than those they see as segregated.

In no way does NICIE call for the erosion of fundamental rights, but we do draw attention to the dangers of maintaining a system based on sectors.

We include below a diagram from the most recent peace monitoring report which clearly illustrates the demographic drift: a protestant majority is evident in the population aged forty and over. Under this age the majority of the population is catholic with the trend more pronounced at younger ages.



If we maintain the status quo of our system of education then we can predict a shift from the present share out of schools where there is already a majority of catholic schools to a situation where that majority becomes more pronounced.

Such a situation is not a recipe for a peaceful and cohesive future and must be addressed.

NICIE respects the steps taken by the catholic church in its commitment to social justice through its opposition to social selection; we call on it to show the same moral leadership in moving education towards a system which is genuinely diverse.

### **A blueprint for change**

NICIE believes we can move beyond segregation without changing the management type of the school or its ownership, through moving from the ‘dominant’ ethos, as described by Judge Treacy in the recent judicial review, to the development of an ethos of equality for all, which is the key characteristic of an integrated school.

NICIE is offering support for schools who wish to move from a dominant ethos to one of equality through our initiative *Positive Partnerships for Integration*. Such an ethos recognises the diversity which exists in every classroom today and does not cloak individual and multiple identities under historical labels. Each individual child is entitled to be recognised as an individual first and foremost, not as an inherited identity, be that of religion or nationality.

It is for this reason that NICIE supports the recommendation of the Bain report: ‘We advocate, therefore, not a single approach to integration, but a more pervasive and inclusive strategy, focused on the dynamic process of integrating education across the school system.’ In such an integrated system of education, there would continue to be single identity schools, including catholic faith-based schools. These schools would be obliged to engage with shared education to

ensure their children and young people had opportunities to learn together. There would be shared campuses where the emphasis would be on sustained, daily sharing of learning. There would be schools integrated in law, and schools which might be of different management types but which would be integrated in ethos, as defined by Judge Treacy. Such an integrated system of education would remove our schools from their historical positions as serving only one community and allow for a system of education where one side does not dominate and where pluralism becomes a reality.

### **Levers for change**

NICIE suggests that there are a number of structural changes which, if addressed, would facilitate the reform of our educational system.

### **Governance**

We have a complicated and varied system of school governance. A common structure of governance for all schools would support movement towards an integrated and unified system of education.

### **Ownership**

For historical reasons we have an equally complex system of ownership of schools. While recognising the historic financial contribution to the catholic school sector, all publicly funded schools should be owned by the state. NICIE recognises that significant negotiation would be needed to advance this; an independent commission would be best placed to advance it.

## **Planning**

There is no provision for the planning of integrated schools. This is discriminatory and unequal and must be addressed.

## **Teacher education**

We do not prepare our teachers to teach in either integrated schools or in shared classrooms. The recent independent enquiry into initial teacher education argued that the status quo in teacher education is not implemented and offered a range of options for reform, all of which protected specific catholic teacher training within a pluralist model. We urge the necessary changes in teacher training to provide teachers with the skills and attributes to educate the diversity of our classrooms.

## **Human rights**

Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states: ‘the education of the child shall be directed to ... the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origins.’

NICIE argues that our schools must create the conditions that allow this to happen; under CRED policy they are obliged to do so. We insist that this happens most effectively in the classroom where there is an acknowledged diversity and the openness which allows difference to be acknowledged and division challenged. Research over thirty years shows that children in integrated schools have many cross community friendships, that these friendships sustain into adulthood, and that, as young people, those who have been to integrated schools are more positive about the future and about good community relations.

## **Shared education**

NICIE welcomes shared education where it has the focus of deepening learning between, about and with others, and we have led a successful training programme for teachers to support this. Our fear is that shared education becomes a means of preserving the status quo rather than a way to move beyond it. The minister for education clearly put the needs of areas and individuals before sectors and institutions when he introduced area based planning. The need of the shared campus or shared partnership should be based on the needs of the young people, not on the protection of particular forms of management.

## **The statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education**

In their submissions, both CCMS and NICCE call on the education committee to recommend an end to the long-standing statutory duty on the department of education to encourage and facilitate the development of formally integrated education. They argue: ‘this duty is not only unjust, it also undermines the fundamental principles of equality, respect for difference and for the rights of others upon which a truly diverse, peaceful and tolerant society is based.’

NICIE expresses its dismay at this attack on integrated education. We draw attention to the underwriting of article 64 in the Good Friday Agreement. Are CCMS and NICCE also calling for a rewriting of this agreement? We note that an obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education had to be written into law because of implacable opposition to this type of schooling from the catholic church as well as from politicians. The position of most politicians has changed in the last thirty years. We note that the reason for a statutory obligation to support integrated education is still valid — that is, that the segregated system still exists. We repeat our concern, heightened by this latest demand from CCMS and NICCE, that the concept of shared education is in danger of becoming a partisan means of protecting the status quo.

## **The need for article 64**

NICIE reflects on the irony of the demand to remove article 64 when it is clear that there has not been a proactive implementation of this duty. The failure to carry out this duty has severely constrained the growth and expansion of integration. This is most evident in the area of planning. There is no mechanism for planning for integrated schools. CCMS plans provision for catholic schools and ELBs plan provision for controlled schools, but parents seeking an integrated school must achieve this by their own efforts, either by establishing a new school or through a process of transformation, a process which has not been supported by NICCE, resulting in only controlled schools using this process. This is discriminatory and unequal.

NICIE had hoped that area based planning would rectify this inequity. Instead the managing authorities have planned for their own sectors and have not sought the innovative shared solutions the minister asked for. Parents are consulted in relation to change within sectors, not about the type of school they might prefer. Parental choice becomes a hollow concept indeed when the vast majority of integrated schools are already oversubscribed and when there are many areas which have no integrated schools. Add in the scandal of attaching what should be non-sectoral nursery units to single identity schools and the denial of parental choice is complete.

The recent judicial review was sought because of the failure to approve growth in an oversubscribed integrated school. The ruling noted that the ‘needs model’, which fixes children in the designations of catholic, protestant or integrated, could be seen to hinder integration. NICIE’s opposition to this model of planing is well documented. Parents should not be deprived of their choice of an integrated education because it will impact on numbers in other schools, schools which are protected and planned for by their managing authority. We highlight further the danger of pigeon holing children by presumed religion and argue this is no way to plan for an education fit for a 21st century society. This use of the shorthand ‘catholic’ or ‘protestant’ underlines the acceptance of division which is embedded in official thinking and which contributes to a culture of division.



## **The achievements of integrated education**

Despite the failure to plan for integrated education, its success is unquestioned. Since 2000, against a background of a significant drop in the number of school goers, student numbers in integrated education increased by 53%. At the same time the numbers attending catholic schools plummeted by 7.7%.

NICCE notes that ‘increasing numbers of pupils from across the community spectrum are opting in to the Catholic sector. In towns like Bangor, Lisburn and Coleraine/Portstewart, pupils are passing the local “integrated” schools and choosing Catholic schools...’ It is significant that NICCE references the four catholic schools which have a mixed intake. Overall, only 0.9% of children in catholic maintained schools are protestant. This is not surprising when in its CCMS submission we are reminded that, despite being welcoming to all, ‘the schools are nevertheless quite clearly and unapologetically Catholic in ethos and daily practice’.

This focus on catholic ethos illustrates Judge Treacy's reference to dominant ethos and partisan boards and encapsulates the critical difference between catholic and integrated schools where an equality of respect is evident for all.

## **Conclusion**

We welcome NICCE's reiteration of CCMS's call for the minister to evaluate the public appetite for ‘Integrated Education’. All public opinion surveys show significant and consistent support for integrated education. NICIE wishes to see this support tested at local level when educational change is proposed. We ask for parents to be given a voice in shaping the type of school they wish to see. We ask for parents to be consulted on the full range of choice instead of the presumption in favour of preserving sectors.

We further recognise that our call to move beyond a segregated system of education has implications for integration also. NICIE has no desire to create an integrated sector — our aim is to ensure children and young people can learn together on a daily basis; our aim is to move education beyond its alignment with the divisions of the past. All schools can and should play their part in this process. Both main sectors should encourage their schools to engage with *Positive Partnerships* to enable this to happen.

If such change from within is not possible then an independent commission should be tasked with desegregating our system.

NICIE contends that our education system is part of the problem of our divided society; it allows for the perpetuation of the catholic/protestant divide and maintains the notion of ‘other’. NICCE argues that there is no connection between our education system and our divided society. An independent commission could test the veracity of both views and make recommendations, binding on all publicly-funded education for the future.

We note the NICCE sociological query: ‘Have any pupils or parents of pupils from integrated schools been involved in interface rioting or other forms of sectarian civil disturbance over recent years?’ This would be interesting to pursue, set in the context of the violence of the ‘troubles’ and the educational backgrounds of those involved. What we do know is that controversial issues, including the issue of rioting, are addressed openly in integrated schools, with an exchange of views that allows for challenge, reflection and learning.

Finally, on the issue of economics, it has been estimated that £80 million a year would be saved if we did not have duplication and triplication of schools, but even that figure is an underestimation, since the longer term reduction in policing costs as the impact of an integrated system of education supported a more cohesive society has not been factored into the calculation.