Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Education

Inquiry into Shared/Integrated Education

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Background

The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) serves the district council areas of Armagh; Banbridge; Cookstown; Craigavon; Dungannon and South Tyrone; Newry and Mourne.

The SELB has been involved in leading, managing and promoting a range of school-based cross-community contact programmes since the early 1980s. These programmes have included the Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) Programme, the Schools Community Relations Programme (SCRP) and the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy and strategy (CRED). More recently, the SELB has led the implementation of two Shared Education Projects, funded through the International Fund for Ireland's (IFI's) 'Sharing in Education' Programme: the 'Primary Curriculum Partnership Programme' (PCPP) and the 'Welcoming Schools' Project (2011-2013).

Under current legislation, the SELB has no direct powers or responsibilities in relation to the promotion of shared education, but through the work of its Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) and its Youth Service, all schools and youth groups are encouraged and supported to engage in meaningful cross-community collaboration and sharing. Through its leadership of the IFI funded Sharing in Education programmes, the SELB has facilitated the development of a number of local school-based examples of meaningful shared education programmes, which have helped to establish sharing as normal practice. Examples include the development of sharing and curricular collaboration between the two primary schools in the village of Moy, which have led to those schools' joint application for funding from the Department of Education's (DE's) Shared Campus Programme. This application was one of only three which have recently been approved for funding and work to create a shared campus is now underway.

The SELB also has a limited role, under current legislation, in relation to Integrated Education, with its major responsibility being to facilitate elements of the 'transformation' process, through which a school may apply for change of status and become formally recognised as 'integrated'. The SELB, in common with all ELBs, is required to respond to parental requests for information on integrated education and on the process for transformation to controlled integrated status and will collaborate with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) where such requests arise. While there are a number of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools within the SELB, there are only two that fall under the management of the SELB, as Controlled Integrated Schools, namely Brownlow Integrated College in Craigavon and Kilbroney Integrated Primary School in Rostrevor.

1. Definitions

1.1 Shared Education

Shared Education has been defined by the Department of Education as follows:

Shared education means the organisation and delivery of education so that it:

- meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status;

- involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and

- delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

Shared Education encourages schools from across all the educational sectors within Northern Ireland to work together for the greater good of their pupils. It is expected that Shared Education will be organised and delivered in such a way that promotes equality of opportunity and social inclusion by providing opportunities for children from differing Section 75 groups (e.g. children from different racial backgrounds, children with and without disabilities, children who are carers or school age mothers) and from differing socio-economic backgrounds to learn together at school and in less formal education. Within shared approaches to educational provision, the right of parents and pupils to choose to attend a school with a particular ethos is fully respected.

1.2 Integrated Education

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education has defined Integrated Education as follows:

"Integrated schools bring together children and adults from Catholic, Protestant and other backgrounds in each school. The schools strive to achieve a religious balance of pupils, teachers and governors and acknowledge and respect the cultural diversity they represent.

Integrated schools educate children in an environment where self-esteem and independence are developed as priorities. Self-respect and respect for others are strongly encouraged. The integrated ethos is nurtured to ensure inclusion of people from different religions, cultures, genders, abilities and socio-economic backgrounds."

1.3 Both shared and integrated approaches to the provision of education have the potential to provide learners with enhanced opportunities to acquire a range of transferable skills and capabilities including those of decision making, problem solving, leadership and teamwork - all of which will be of benefit to them in later life. Positive participation in shared/integrated activities has been shown to build pupils' self-esteem, self-efficacy and ability to express themselves and their identity with confidence, whilst being respectful of the identities of others. Such approaches support pupils to take responsibility for their actions, and to

demonstrate that they can work together with others from different backgrounds and cultures.

1.4 Links with Key Education Policies

Shared Education and Integrated Education can both be clearly linked to key DE policies including the 'Every School a Good School' School Improvement suite of policies and the 'Community Relations and Equality and Diversity' policy, through their promotion of child-centred provision, high quality learning and teaching, effective leadership and schools connected to their community. Through shared education projects, schools are providing value-added educational experiences which link clearly with school improvement. In its evaluation of the IFI Funded 'Sharing in Education Programme,' the Education and Training Inspectorate concluded:

"The evidence demonstrates that high-quality shared education contributes to better learning for young people. The young people demonstrated positive attitudes and dispositions to learning, developed their thinking skills and personal capabilities and displayed good personal and social skills."

ETI Final Evaluation of the Sharing in Education Programme, Oct 2013.

Both models of provision also clearly support the N.I. Executive's 'Together Building a United Community' Strategy as both are focused on improving community relations and in supporting the development of a more unified and shared society.

2. Key Barriers and Enablers

Through the experience of leading and managing the implementation of Shared Education programmes, as well as many years of supporting cross-community contact programmes, SELB officers have concluded that the quality of shared education and integrated education provision depends significantly on:

- a school's ethos
- the effectiveness of the leadership within the school and on
- opportunities for the professional development of members of staff, especially when dealing with more controversial issues and the attitudes and values present within the community the school serves.

2.1 Barriers and Enablers - Shared Education:

The table below identifies the key barriers and enablers for shared education, based on SELB officers' experience of developing and implementing shared education programmes.

Barriers	Enablers
Lack of Effective School Leadership: Lack of leadership and vision to promote and see the value of shared education will be a significant barrier. The development and sustaining of shared education will be hindered if it is not a high priority for a school's leadership team, including the Board of Governors. Lack of leadership ability and capacity within a school can also be a barrier, as the development of shared approaches to provision requires a high level of skill, in terms of building understanding, bringing people on board, overcoming resistance, etc.	**Effective School Leadership:** An environment where there is a clear commitment within school leadership to the development and sustaining of shared education is key to success. In such schools, the commitment to the development of shared provision is evident and is fully embedded in the ethos, values, practice and professional relationships. In such schools, school leaders show vision and commitment to the development and sustaining of shared provision, particularly during critical points in the development of collaboration, when difficulties may be encountered. Existing good relationships between school leaders and staff from participating schools is clearly beneficial in providing a foundation upon which collaboration can be built.
Shared education viewed as an additional initiative to be implemented within an already crowded curriculum Failure to see shared approaches and collaboration as a means towards enriching existing curricular provision rather than as an additional aspect of provision which has to be fitted is a substantial barrier to development.	**A perspective which views shared provision as an opportunity to enrich and enhance the existing curriculum, rather than an additional initiative to be implemented** When shared education and shared classes focus on enhancing the quality of provision of elements of the already existing NI curriculum, teachers and pupils see meaning and value in the approach, in terms of its potential to support learning and achievement, as well as achieving reconciliation objectives.
Lack of staff expertise and training School staff will often be unwilling to participate in shared education initiatives due to a perceived lack of expertise and experience in dealing with sensitive and controversial issues related to cross-community contact.	**Availability of high quality professional development for all staff** High quality professional development provided for teachers, enabling them to explore and develop their own understanding in relation to more sensitive issues, has been shown to be crucial in building skill, competence and confidence in school staff.

Barriers	Enablers
Time: Timetabling issues, especially in post primary schools, may be seen as a significant barrier to enabling shared and collaborative provision, particularly within Key Stage 4 and post-16 provision, due to pressure of covering exam syllabuses. Additional work is required of staff involved in organising and delivering collaboration and a lack of time to facilitate this may become a barrier. The contact between schools needs to be regular and sustained throughout the academic year if shared provision is to be effective. This may also be a challenge for many schools.	**Time:** In the most effective practice, school leaders prioritise time for the developing of relationships between partner schools, time for provision of whole school professional development, time for planning and sharing work by teachers and timetabling that enables shared classes to take place. Through planned, regular and on-going pupil contact, there is a reduced anxiety/ sense of threat within staff and pupils which may sometimes be associated with shared and collaborative provision.
Pupils: In most schools only a minority of pupils are likely to be resistant to working with pupils from another sector. This will often stem from resistance by parents and the wider community, as well as from fears of intimidation from 'the other sector'. These concerns must be acknowledges and attended to.	**Pupils:** Generally, a majority of pupils enjoy and see the benefits of shared education experiences. Experience has shown that many pupils consider differing religious or cultural backgrounds as less important than shared interests when they engage in shared activities.
Funding: Lack of adequate funding or removal of funding will inhibit the quality, depth and sustainability of sharing and collaboration.	**Funding:** If adequate funding is sourced and made available to fund core activities, shared classes, transport and professional development for staff, there is evidence of a greater level of effective and sustained collaboration. This has been shown to be particularly important in the early stages of developing shared provision.
Resistance from parents/ local Community: Existing community tensions and a lack of willingness to engage with other communities can create difficulties for schools in developing sharing opportunities with another sector.	**Supportive parents/local community:** Research indicates that the relationship between the school and the local community is an important factor in the promotion of collaboration and may be an important determinant of local community receptiveness to it. Supportive parents understand that shared education will not detract from or threaten the values, beliefs and ethos of each community.

3. Models of Good Practice

3.1 Experience of Shared Education in the SELB area

3.1i The SELB has limited powers and responsibilities in relation to the promotion of shared education, but actively encourages schools to engage in collaboration and sharing through a range of programmes and projects. The SELB has been involved in supporting shared and collaborative provision for over twenty years, through Programmes such as EMU and SCRP and CRED. There are also more recent examples of meaningful shared education programmes where sharing in schools has become the accepted normality. Examples include the 'Primary Curriculum Partnership Programme' (PCPP) and the 'Welcoming Schools' project (2011-2013), both projects were funded by the International Fund for Ireland and managed within the SELB.

3.1ii The PCPP project was a cross community project, whereby schools within the same community, village or town, and from different religious backgrounds, worked in partnership with each other. The project provided shared training and support structures for staff to deliver lessons in shared classrooms. The project required whole school involvement, working with Principals, Board of Governors and all members of the school staff and the wider school community, including parents. The rationale for this approach was that the whole school community would benefit from meaningful collaboration and that the work was linked very closely to school improvement, aiming to improve the quality of teaching and learning. With whole school involvement and the project being a central part of the school development plan, there were clear examples of the more efficient and effective use of resources, and the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. ETI evaluation of the project clearly indicated the improvements in learning and teaching:

> *"The children and staff handled controversial and sensitive issues more effectively. This resulted in raising standards of learning and teaching in PDMU for the children and schools."*
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> *ETI Second Interim Evaluation of PCPP, June 2013.*

3.1iii SELB schools have engaged positively in other shared education work, including the IFI funded project 'Sharing Classrooms, Deepening Learning' aimed at post primary schools and delivered through the Area Learning Communities and through participation in the Queens University Sharing in Education Programme, funded by IFI and Atlantic Philanthropies.

3.1iv A key feature of the Entitlement Framework in the SELB is the extensive collaboration between schools in order to support effective delivery of the required range of GCSE and Post 16 courses. There is an even greater need for sharing costs and resources with schools and pupils from across the sectors working together in order to maximise the effectiveness of resources and increase educational choice. This is particularly pertinent given the current economic situation, coupled with the Entitlement Framework requirements which many schools will struggling to provide without collaboration.

3.1v The SELB has been managing the CRED schools' programme through which a number of schools are involved in collaboration and sharing on a range of Section 75 issues. Projects have included work between all sectors, including mainstream and special schools where significant benefits have been recorded. The broader approach to inclusion, equality and diversity, promoted through CRED has stimulated and enabled new areas of collaboration between schools and the tackling of a broader range of issues.

4. Priorities and Actions:

To support the Committee's consideration of what priorities and actions to be taken to improve sharing and integration, the SELB, based on experience of leading and facilitating the development of shared education, would suggest the following:

1. It is vital to engage with schools and communities to raise awareness and develop a deeper understanding of shared education. Targeted engagement with school leaders and Boards of Governors is required in order to promote, encourage and challenge their commitment to developing shared models of educational provision.
2. The concerns of the teaching staff involved in shared education projects and the key role played by the principal and Senior Leadership Team need to be considered and addressed in any development work. In particular, adequate professional development and adequate planning time is necessary to prepare principals, staff and governors for engaging in shared education developments.
3. Close engagement with parents and the local community is essential, especially in areas where there may be community tensions around sharing and collaboration between and across sectors.
4. In the development of shared education practice, it will be helpful for schools to have a range of tested models of effective practice available for consideration, together with advice and guidance on that range of models for shared provision. A collation of existing and previous effective models of shared education would provide a useful resource.
5. The integrated sector has substantial experience of dealing with difficult issues such as sectarianism and conflict resolution as well as experience of teaching children about diversity, respect and tolerance for others. This learning and experience should be drawn upon in the further development of shared and integrated models of provision.
6. It is apparent that no one model of provision fits all situations and contexts. The most appropriate model will be the model that has the support of the community which a school or schools serve.