

St. Mary's Limavady - Shared and Integrated Education Inquiry : Request for Written Evidence

As a school with a history of more than forty years of shared, cross – sectoral educational delivery, we are delighted to contribute to this current inquiry by the Education Committee.

We would invite the committee to reflect on our submission below and would welcome the opportunity to meet and speak with the committee. Should the Committee wish, they would be welcome to visit and experience first-hand our Shared delivery of Education.

To contribute to this current inquiry effectively we will address the committees terms of reference directly:

1. *Review the nature and definition of Shared Education and Integrated Education*

We feel it is important at the outset to clarify that Shared Education and Integrated Education are not the same.

Both have clear definitions which clearly identify the main differences. Shared Education allows sectors to maintain their own identity (religious ethos, academic selection etc) and yet share their delivery of education for mutual benefit. Integrated education is the creation of a separate shared sector in which all participants accept their identity is determined by the sector ethos which does not endorse religious or academic difference.

As clear formal definitions exist (Dr. Paul Connolly proposed a definition for Shared Education, NICCE proposed a definition for integrated Education) we do not feel there is a need for the committee to do likewise. Should the committee see the need for these to be adopted as statutory, we do not see the need for revision before doing so.

Obligation in statute to facilitate and encourage Shared Education

Given the obligation on the Education Minister to facilitate and encourage Integrated Education, given the small percentage of the school population which attend the integrated sector, it would appear logical that the Education Minister facilitate and encourage Shared Education. The Shared Educational Campuses Programme, alongside recent Atlantic Philanthropies funding which will be overseen by the Education and Library Boards, are both initiatives upon which to build.

2. *Key barriers and Enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education.*

The failure of educational authorities to address the underlying issue of school age population V school places makes true sharing across sectors very difficult. The underpinning competition between sectors to fill places means schools can only share to a certain degree.

The key enabler of Sharing is always mutual benefit – be these curriculum, economic, social or otherwise. The greater the advantages that can be identified, the greater the enablement.

The Key barriers and enablers of Integrated Education are better identified and discussed for the committee by educators from within the integrated sector.

3. Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice.

We believe ourselves, St. Mary's Limavady and Limavady High School have an excellent model to reflect upon and learn lessons from. Cross and Passion College and Ballycastle High School also enjoy a mature and effective model of Shared cross sector delivery.

Our model includes shared classes at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 seeing close to 500 students experience shared lessons weekly. This is underpinning by shared staff planning, shared staff training, shared parents evenings, shared student enrichment activities, joint student councils and Shared Capital Programmes. At all levels our model of Sharing is putting in place a Shared future between the two schools.

4. Priorities and Actions which need to be taken

The main issue to be addressed in the current Northern Ireland Education system is the underlying issue of school age population V school places. Only when schools have a certain and sustainable future can they firstly exist and secondly share in confidence and trust.

The CRED policy, the role of parents, inclusion of Special Schools are all aspects which a dynamic and programme of Shared Education encompasses.