

Dear Members of the Assembly for Northern Ireland,

I wish to make a brief submission to your enquiry into integrated & shared education on behalf of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship &, in particular, our member school in Northern Ireland, Holywood Steiner School (www.hollywood-steiner.co.uk).

Rudolf Steiner (Waldorf) education is a world-wide grouping of schools working with an educational philosophy & curriculum, the bases of which were developed for the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, 1919. There are now approximately 3000 Waldorf settings (including kindergartens & all-through schools to age 18) in over 60 countries. In a number of these countries the education is publically funded, either as "schools of distinctive character" (e.g. New Zealand, Germany &c) or full members of the public education system (e.g. Holland, Finland &c). The SWSF (www.steinerwaldorf.org) is the member organisation for Steiner Waldorf schools throughout the UK & the Republic of Ireland, with some 48 members including full schools & early years centres (not including initiative groups or other affiliate members). In England four members are publically-funded under the Academy programme & in the Republic of Ireland two members are Steiner National Schools (both in County Clare). European co-operation is achieved via the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (www.ecswe.net) at which the associations for Waldorf education are represented, both those within & out with the European Union or EEA (e.g. Russia & Armenia). All schools are comprehensive, co-educational & run as co-operative enterprises with parents.

The principles of Steiner Waldorf education are intended to support young people to develop as resourceful, creative, & active citizens with a deep sense of tolerance to inform an awareness of, & respect for, cultural & other varieties of human background & experience. Relevant to this Enquiry & to the contribution of Waldorf education in this regard are the findings of Dr Christian Pffeifer of the Department of Criminology for Lower Saxony which found Waldorf pupils to show statistically lower intolerant or racist responses than young people of the same age in other types of German Secondary school (www.uni-konstanz.de/rtf/ki/Download_Abridged_Version.pdf). Furthermore, Waldorf schools have not infrequently worked across divided communities, including, for example, combined Palestinian & Israeli schools in Israel, a school for children orphaned during the civil war in Sierra Leone &, during the apartheid era in South Africa, the provision of integrated education in integrated classrooms. In the view of SWSF, educating children together, with

a care for the development of social & emotional intelligences alongside academic skills, is essential & the only sound basis for building healthy societies.

Our member school, Hollywood Steiner School, has been in existence since 1974. Throughout this time, operating, reluctantly as a private school (although charitably registered) it has attempted to explore options that would make it more accessible to a wider demographic. Negotiations have taken place with past holders of the education mandate. On a number of occasions, the school has been advised to try to obtain integrated school status. They have children on roll from both traditions & none, but the route to integrated status has been blocked by a simple, dilemma: they have maintained a policy of **not** requesting at admission any information about religious affiliation. In this respect the school seeks to be blind to what might otherwise act as a divisive label.

We understand that the number of Integrated schools in Northern Ireland is gradually increasing. We also recognise the exceptional work being done by teachers throughout the country to provide opportunities for children to come together. While we respect the intent & positive results of this work, we wish to point out that, with an estimated 93% of pupils still attending segregated schools, the Enquiry seems to need a broader view (the 93% quoted here is based on the Department of Education's own estimate that Integrated schools educated around 7% of pupils). The Integrated Education Fund clearly does very important work, but this has its limitations as a result of the criteria it has to apply. Shared education schemes too have their unintended draw-backs (partially acknowledged in the March 2013 Ministerial Advisory Group report, *Advancing Shared Education* & set out in stronger colours in an article in the Belfast Telegraph, 14/10/2014 by Steven Agnew). SWSF would, consequently, propose that the Committee explore how greater diversity of educational philosophy & provision could be actively encouraged. In our view, the Hollywood Steiner School, which has struggled with inadequate resources for so long, at least represents one model the Committee might be advised to examine. While greater unity through diversity might sound a counter intuitive approach, it is one that has been successfully applied for centuries in the Netherlands from a time when itself was emerging from a period of self-destructive conflict.

A more modest, & readily implementable proposal might be simply to add it as a requirement for your inspectorate to comment on the contribution of any school in fostering community cohesion. This could be done with or without introducing a specific standard. The inclusion of an overview judgement in published reports would be a stimulus to all schools to demonstrate what they do & provide essential evidence for future or ongoing review of progress. ETI reports might

include such a comment either under part 7, "Leadership & Management", or as a discrete judgement, as a part 8 (i.e. above the "conclusion" of reports as currently written). It must be a matter of disappointment, if it reflects general practice, that none of the available inspection reports briefly surveyed in the writing of this submission made reference to this important aspect of a school's potential contribution.

Please refer to the undersigned if your Committee wishes to discuss any aspects of this email.

With respects,
Yours faithfully,
Kevin Avison
Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship