

As Principal of Cedar Integrated Primary School I welcome the opportunity to comment on the contents of the Shared Education Bill.

Shared education can give children the opportunity to learn from and with those who come from different backgrounds. Unfortunately this Bill does not set out a vision or framework to show how shared education can progress a shared future for Northern Ireland.

The short four-clause Bill has encapsulated the definition of shared education into a few brief lines. There have been a number of definitions of shared education from different organisations and the department itself over the past number of years, which have been more inclusive and robust than the one purposed to be enshrined in legislation.

Integrated education is the highest form of sharing; integrated schools educate our young people side by side every day, they experience and learn to celebrate difference. Cedar IPS has grown from strength to strength and is now celebrating 20 years of educating children from all backgrounds together. In “Sharing Works- a Policy for Shared Education” it says, ‘integrated education, which has already embraced a culture of diversity, is at the upper end of that continuum. Indeed, by supporting Shared Education, it is envisaged that a proportion of schools may move along the continuum to a more fully integrated model.’ Yet there is no mention of integrated education or how this progress can be achieved in the Bill.

The integrated education movement would like to see the inclusion of a new clause or amendments putting a duty on the Education Department or Education Authority to help schools involved in sharing projects explore the possibility of moving up the continuum. Putting this responsibility on those who will have a power to encourage and facilitate shared education creates a robust mechanism to ensure that any school who wishes to explore integration as an option will be fully supported in doing so. The lack of responsibility and clear sign-posting at present is impeding schools in exploring models of integration.

As a primary school principal I see this important Bill shaped to ensure that Shared Education works to the maximum advantage of Northern Ireland’s children and young people. I am confident that the vast majority of parents want a truly shared future, and our children deserve legislation which genuinely moves us forward to achieve that.

Yours faithfully

Hilary Crichton
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Cedar IPS.