

As a governor in an integrated school I feel:

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. 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.

I am confident that the vast majority of the population want a truly shared future, and must have in place legislation which genuinely moves us forward to achieve that.

Helen Bready

Governor, Cedar Integrated School, Crossgar.

As a Foundation Governor at Cedar Integrated Primary School I welcome the opportunity to comment on the contents of the Shared Education Bill.

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As a Governor of an Integrated School I would like to see this important Bill shaped to ensure that Shared Education works to the maximum advantage of Northern Ireland's children and young people. We are confident that the vast majority of the population wants a truly shared future, and we deserve legislation which genuinely moves us forward to achieve that.

Yours sincerely,

Gerard Curry

Foundation Governor

To whom it may concern

I am writing with regard to the proposed Shared Education Bill, and I would like to raise a number of issues.

I would like to highlight that there is no mention of 'Integrated Education' in the shared education Bill. Integrated education is surely the highest form of 'Shared Education' that is operating in Northern Ireland at nursery, primary and post-primary schools. It forms a part of the education sector that has been operating successfully for over 30 years. With over 60 integrated schools operating successfully in Northern Ireland, with other schools in the process of transforming, this sector surely this growing sector needs to be recognised in the Shared Education Bill.

If the provision were available in terms of schools, it is on record from surveys conducted, that a high percentage of the population of Northern Ireland would choose education, where children are educated together. Integrated schools are operating 'shared education' on a daily basis in schools, with pupils of all faiths and none, studying, learning and playing together side by side in harmony.

There is also no mention in the bill of a level of progression in the process of shared education - ie moving onwards from shared to integrated education.

Also, in Section 2 of the bill, subsection 2, NICIE (the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education) has been omitted. NICIE are not only working directly with integrated schools already in existence, but also with those schools who are in the process of transforming into integrated schools.

The bill has stated that the bodies listed in subsection (2) may encourage and facilitate shared education. The fact that NICIE, the major facilitator of an education that is 'shared by all' in integrated schools, is not listed amongst these bodies is surely a glaring omission that has to be rectified.

The education of our children is surely one of the most important areas that the Assembly should be focussing on. Our children are the future of Northern Ireland and therefore, the basis for change in Northern Ireland must start at the beginning of a child's journey into education. Is it not better for children to be in a classroom and a school, starting their educational journey side by side with children from all faiths and none, rather than a 'them' and 'us culture that currently exists?

Thank you in advance for reading my views.

Yours sincerely

Karen Chambers

Parent Governor

Cedar Integrated Primary School, Crossgar