

Cranmore Integrated Primary School welcomes the opportunity to comment on the contents of the proposed Shared Education Bill.

Introduction and Background

Cranmore Integrated Primary School was established in 1993 as an all-ability integrated primary school. The school initially opened with 37 pupils and 3 teaching staff in rented accommodation off the Lisburn Road, Belfast. In 2015 Cranmore IPS has grown to 208 pupils and a staff of 30 people both teaching and non-teaching.

We currently operate a Pre-school facility which provides 24 PEAG funded places.

Shared Education and Integrated Education

We welcome any school working in partnership with others to improve the educational outcomes and standards for pupils and do so in the context of promoting better community relations. However we contend that shared education and integrated education are not the same thing. Integrated education is a 'standalone concept' as acknowledged by Judge Treacey and there is a statutory duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. It is therefore disappointing that the proposed Shared Education Bill makes no reference in any sense to the integrated model or indeed the excellent work carried out by integrated schools in healing division and promoting sharing as the norm.

Clause 1

It was made clear by the Department in 'Sharing Works – a Policy for Shared Education' that integrated education is at the upper end of the continuum and that schools could if they wished move along this continuum to higher levels of co-operation and sharing.

The definition given in Clause 1 is very weak and needs to be more robust. We believe that 'relevant providers' can and should include two or more integrated schools collaborating. The argument for cross sector support is not relevant to the Controlled Integrated or Grant Maintained Integrated Schools as these schools already have a mix of pupils of different religious belief or political beliefs and those who are experiencing significant socio-economic deprivation and those who are not.'

We are also concerned that some bodies in their submissions to date are using the concept of shared education as an argument to curtail the development of integrated education and are advocating that the statutory duty to encourage integrated education (Article 64) should be ditched. The Bill must acknowledge the decades of work pioneered by integrated schools to ensure that sharing is addressed and promoted in every way. This linkage to integrated education will enhance and support the future development of sharing.

Cranmore IPS proposes that a statement should be added to Article 2 stating that, 'Shared Education recognises that integrated education is an important and well tested model of sharing.'

Clause 2

We are disappointed that there is no reference to integrated education and how it has a role to play in encouraging shared education and demonstrating good practice in promoting a genuine shared future. We would also welcome a duty on the Department of Education and Education Authority to assist

those schools who are willing to move further along the continuum and in doing so become formally constituted Integrated Schools.

We note that the terminology in this bill, ‘places a power on the Department and its arm’s length bodies to encourage and facilitate shared education.’ In the interests of fairness, equality and parity of esteem we request the Department to give a similar ‘power’ also in relation to the concept of integrated education. This will allow the Department to fulfil the statutory duty as laid down in legislation equally it will allow integrated education to develop and expand to meet the demand which currently is exceptionally high.

In the last year applications for enrolment to Cranmore IPS and Pre-school were as follows:

	Places	Applications	% Oversubscribed
Primary School	30	43	43%
Pre-school	24	43	79%

Clause 3

We recognise the importance of the Education Authority being given ‘a duty’ to facilitate and encourage shared education. However, again in the interests of fairness, equality and parity of esteem we believe the Education Authority should include the growth and development of integrated education in all Area Based Planning. This should also include a mechanism of support to increase the number of integrated schools with statutory nursery provision as opposed to voluntary pre-school playgroups.

Clause 4

No comment

Conclusion

In Cranmore we are currently facilitating a sharing programme with Oakwood IPS and Malone Integrated College. This is a wonderful project which has involved whole staff training (engaging over 130 teaching and non-teaching staff). It is also bringing together 90 pupils from protestant, catholic and other background in sharing and collaborating at a deeper level.

It is hugely disappointing that this programme does not meet the current criteria for Shared education funding. The simple fact is that Controlled and Maintained schools in our area are unwilling to work alongside us as they perceive Cranmore to be a threat to future enrolments.

We urge the Education committee and the Northern Ireland Assembly to change the current criteria to allow 2 or more integrated schools to be able to have their collaborative work recognised as shared education.

We also request formal recognition of the exceptional work of integrated schools.