

**SUBMISSION FROM EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

**IN RELATION TO**

**SHARED EDUCATION BILL**

## **COMMENTS ON THE SHARED EDUCATION BILL FROM THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

### **Clause 1**

The Education Authority (EA) welcomes the reference to those of different religious belief, and, while recognising that the main religions in Northern Ireland are Protestant and Catholic, believes that this reference is inclusive and allows for the changing nature of the Northern Ireland community that includes significant numbers of newcomers of various faiths and individuals of no faith.

While acknowledging, in principle, the potential benefits of the reference to sharing between those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not EA believes that the practical operation of this aspect of the clause is likely to be complex. Many individual schools contain a mix of such children and young people and therefore the process of partnering schools having been defined as mainly containing children and young people experiencing socio-economic deprivation or not could lead to a risk of labeling and potential stigmatisation of certain schools.

The clause could be supported by guidance to contain a definition of schools experiencing socio-economic deprivation using an indicator, for example, percentage of pupils entitled to Free School Meals given that this is currently used for existing practice such as benchmarking school performance as part of school self evaluation.

EA welcomes the indication that sharing should involve two or more relevant providers and the reference to other providers including Youth Services.

### **Clause 2**

EA notes that this clause confers a power to encourage and facilitate shared education on the named bodies. Given that the EA will have a duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education consideration should be given to placing a duty on the named organizations and also including the requirement to promote, in addition to the current wording of encourage and facilitate.

This clause could be amended to read duty not power.

### **Clause 3**

EA is content with the wording of this clause, given that it signals a commencement of the duty already contained within the Education Act (NI) 2014

### **Clause 4**

EA is supportive of the name of the Act contained within this clause and the timescale for commencement.