



19 November 2015

RESPONSE TO SHARED EDUCATION BILL

Lagan College welcomes the opportunity to comment on the contents of the Shared Education Bill.

Lagan College is fully supportive of any opportunity afforded to any child of school age to experience shared education. Our ethos and values are centred on children from different faith backgrounds, other or none and of all abilities to learn, play and develop together. Lagan College is also fully supportive of using education as a means to ensure further peace building in our society.

Having considered the Shared Education Bill, we are deeply concerned that the Bill does not reflect how the Government would like to see shared education progress to 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.

We believe strongly that the Bill promotes shared education but does not clarify that it is a continuum. We would like to see the Government endorse the fact that a fully integrated and inclusive shared educational experience is at the higher end of this continuum model.

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 to a fully integrated and inclusive shared educational experience.

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.

Lagan College would like to see this important Shared Education 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 and builds upon and cements the work of so many parents and children who have led the way in shared education by opening and supporting inclusive and integrated shared education schools, which have been in existence in Northern Ireland since 1981.

We note that the timeframe to respond to the Shared Education Bill has been very short, which is disappointing considering this is such an important piece of legislation for generations of children to come.

Senior students from Lagan College and I would like to have an opportunity to respond in front of the Education Committee on the Shared Education Bill on either one of the two dates offered.



Submitted by:

Mrs Amanda McNamee

Principal of Lagan College and Secretary to Lagan College's Board of Governors