



Lough View Integrated Primary and Nursery School

RESPONSE TO THE SHARED EDUCATION BILL

Having considered the Bill we have a number of concerns. These are:

1. The definition of 'shared education' in (2)(a) seems simplistic. Indeed to define 'shared education' as the 'education together of those of different religious belief', fails to acknowledge that the divide within our society is intrinsically about cultural identity. While religion in part contributes to this sense of identity, it is not its defining characteristic. A person's sense of being Irish, Northern Irish or British, of being loyalist, unionist, nationalist or republican is the fundamental issue here. The definition of shared education surely needs to reflect this.
2. The definition of 'shared education' (2) (b) which refers to 'those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not' lacks clarity. Does it refer to schools, communities or both? A cynic might argue that in part it feels like a euphemism to describe the two tier system of post primary education that largely still applies in Northern Ireland.
3. Section 3 which refers to the bodies empowered to encourage and facilitate 'shared education', seems to reflect where greatest power lies and singularly fails to acknowledge the role that NICIE has played and can continue to play in promoting and facilitating 'shared education'. This comment is premised on an acknowledgement that integrated education is the ultimate expression of 'shared education,' where the kind of shared experiences between young people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds that this Bill seeks to facilitate, go on every day, all day.
4. There is no mention anywhere in the Bill of Integrated Education. There is a sense that it has been subsumed into 'shared education' and that it is a small facet of a larger initiative. Perhaps this is the intention.
5. Under the current wording of the proposed Bill, there is no suggestion that 'shared education' is a continuum that can facilitate, when and where the conditions are right, a more integrated school system i.e. it can act as a pathway towards school amalgamations and sharing in the fullest sense. The lack of clarity on this point may limit the Bill's power to transform the educational landscape and ultimately our

society. Indeed as it stands the Bill may merely commit schools and communities to a 'toe in the water' approach to sharing for perpetuity. Is this good enough?

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Michael McKnight Principal 17 November 2015