

DATE: 19TH November 2015

RESPONSE TO SHARED EDUCATION BILL – Phoenix Integrated Primary School

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

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. We are currently involved in a shared education project (DSC) with two local primary schools and agree that schools should collaborate to enable them to build relationships and begin to break down barriers within an educational framework. However, from experience nothing can match the continued sustained contact children have by being educated to ether EVERYTHING day.

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. We feel it is only fair that this is clearly defined to give all schools the opportunity to make the choice

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 and it could be perceived that this is specifically to stop any potential growth.

We, in Phoenix IPS 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. In our school we work hard to maintain religious balance which reflects the community we serve. Our children gain much from being educated together – forging friendships with children from areas they may not otherwise have

had the chance to meet. This is done from an early age an early age and builds on the foundations laid in nursery.

Submitted by :

Heather Watson , Principal - on behalf of the Board of Governors

Contact details: c/o Phoenix Integrated Primary School, 80 Fountain Road, Cookstown

Telephone: 028 8675 7096