

Thank you for alerting me to the draft bill Kevin,

My major concern is that there is a vagueness in how 'shared education' is defined..

I think it is important to note that when the Education Committee undertook its study of shared and integrated education, it recommended that shared education should be defined as

'The Committee recommends that Shared Education be defined as curriculum-based interactions that always foreground educational improvement and involve children and young people in sustained whole school/organisation activities across all educational phases **while making optimal use of existing IT infrastructure.**'

I do not see any sign of this definition being used in the bill.

Without such a definition, it is possible that 2 schools could claim that if they were sharing facilities, like a sports field, and where there was no contact between the pupils, they could apply for financial support.

I am concerned that in the policy on shared education produced by the Department of Education, (<https://www.deni.gov.uk/publications/sharing-works-policy-shared-education>) there is no reference to the work of your committee and not a single reference to the use of ICT as a means by which schools can work together.

Given the evidence I already presented to your committee on how the use of ICT with face to face contact really can make a difference and in a cost-effective way to inter-school partnerships, it is a matter of concern that ICT appears from the Department of Education's policy and the draft bill to be entirely missing.

Given that the assessment of ICT by all schools will become statutory next year, and that this includes an obligation for teachers to use ICT for 'exchange', and that every school in Northern Ireland already has the equipment to be able to work together, the failure to include ICT as a key element is not only wasteful of scarce public funds but will make it very difficult for all schools to be able to take part in shared education.

Our research showed that when teachers are obliged to do something, such as assess pupil use of ICT, they are more likely to support work that includes sharing; shared education will not work unless teachers support it and stick with it over the long-term.

The Department may argue that these are matters for implementation by the Education Authority; I disagree. Unless the bill uses your own committee's definition, schools may choose to ignore the potential of ICT.

I hope this is helpful,
Best wishes,

Roger Austin

Kevin

I want to confirm that my previous email to you with comments on the draft bill should be treated as evidence for your committee.

I understand that the Minister takes the view that the use of ICT should merely be an option for schools. Given all the pressure that teachers are under already, they will be more likely to support shared education if it also helps them to fulfil the new requirements around the use of ICT, which as you know become statutory next year and include the use of ICT for exchange.

Can you confirm that this email and my previous response to the draft bill are taken as evidence?

Thank you

Roger Austin

Sent from my iPhone