



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Shared and Integrated  
Education: Ballycastle High School and  
Cross and Passion College

15 October 2014

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Jonathan Craig  
Mr Chris Hazzard  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Nelson McCausland  
Ms Maeve McLaughlin  
Mr Robin Newton  
Mr Seán Rogers  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Mr Ian Williamson	Ballycastle High School
Mrs Barbara Ward	Cross and Passion College

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** I welcome Mrs Barbara Ward, who is the principal of Cross and Passion College, and Mr Ian Williamson, who is the principal of Ballycastle High School. You are both very welcome to the Committee. Thank you for making the journey from Ballycastle. I ask you to make an opening statement, and members will follow up with questions.

**Mrs Barbara Ward (Cross and Passion College):** Thank you. I will open proceedings. My name is Barbara Ward, and I am the principal of Cross and Passion College in Ballycastle, which is a non-selective school. There is a long history of no 11-plus in the area. The school is the product of the amalgamation of the old Cross and Passion Convent Grammar School with the Star of the Sea Secondary School in 1976. It is an all-ability, non-selective context. The school has 756 pupils. I have been principal there for 15 years; I am in my fifteenth year.

**Mr Ian Williamson (Ballycastle High School):** I am Ian Williamson, the principal of Ballycastle High School, which is also a non-selective and all-ability school that has an enrolment of 417 pupils. I was vice-principal at the school for two years and have been principal for four.

Our collaborative partnership in Ballycastle caters for a potential combined enrolment of 1,173 pupils. The purpose of the partnership is to provide a curriculum at Key Stages 4 and 5 that meets the educational needs, interests, abilities and aspirations of all pupils, supports the local economy and provides pathways into further and higher education. The partnership has grown organically over a significant number of years, primarily to meet an educational need in the Ballycastle area. There have been significant social benefits from it to our local community.

**Mrs Ward:** Our schools are set in a rural context. The hinterlands or contributing area to the schools is the town of Ballycastle and a range of rural communities in all directions from it. Interestingly, Ballycastle High School has a smaller, although significant, number of pupils who live in the town, and its rural hinterland is to the west of the town. For Cross and Passion College, the catchment area is the town and the communities to the south and east. The town is the north Antrim focus for post-primary schooling.

The current situation is a maintained Catholic post-primary school and a controlled post-primary school, namely Ballycastle High School. The arrangement, which we will describe to you in more detail in a moment, enjoys the support of the wider community. The business community is very proud of the partnership and is keen to work with us to enhance it. It definitely has the support of pupils, parents, employers and the general public. We have two schools, each with its own identity and ethos. We teach the core curriculum: all the Key Stage 3 teaching and learning is done in the core school. At Key Stage 4, the children study languages, science and learning for life and work. All the core subjects that all pupils from both schools do are taught in the core schools. At Key Stage 4, they share some of the option blocks, which gives more choice, and post-16 there is much wider sharing. Ian will describe that in a bit more detail. The key issue is that the shared learning kicks in at Key Stage 4, but each school has its own identity and ethos. That offers parents a choice of their child receiving a faith-based education or not

**Mr Williamson:** As we pointed out, the initial desire to build on meeting an educational need has grown and developed over decades into a symbiotic relationship, which has resulted in the success story that the arrangement in Ballycastle has become.

The enrolment in both schools, barring occasional variations, is holding its own, with a significant increase in post-16 enrolment. We have retained the confidence of our own community, and we attract significant interest from young people and parents in neighbouring communities. Large numbers of children are sharing and are happy to do so. Over 25% of the combined whole school enrolments are in collaborative classes. At Key Stages 4 and 5, 43% of all pupils in both schools participate in collaborative lessons, which works out at 66% of Ballycastle High School pupils and 31% of Cross and Passion College pupils.

Parents and pupils are confident about the arrangement, which is backed up by comments and anecdotes as well as by more formal self-evaluation. We have developed something in Ballycastle that works for us.

**Mrs Ward:** Ian talked about meeting an educational need, which is one of the big drivers for the partnership. Between our two schools, we have been able to meet the requirements of the entitlement framework and exceed them where it has been appropriate to do so.

We are meeting the needs of a huge range of learners: children of all abilities, aptitudes, interests, social and economic backgrounds and so on. Therefore, the partnership allows us, through sharing, to expand choice for all children. We deal with every type of learner from the young person who could have 4 As with 3 A\*s at A level and 11 As, including 10 A\*s, at GCSE right through to children with special educational needs. The sharing allows us to provide for that full range of young people in the community.

One of the things that we have been able to do is meet the needs of the local economy. An important part of post-primary education is meeting the needs of those who go into further and higher education, but every community, particularly rural communities, needs people with the skills and qualifications who will thrive and provide employment to survive. The partnership has allowed us to make that a key consideration. With our local business community, we have looked at the additionality and asked what additional courses our young people will engage in.

We have been able to look at qualifications in hospitality, agriculture, science, creative media production and enterprise. For example, for the subject of business studies, there is a general A level but there is also an applied A level. So, again, you are meeting the needs of a great range of young people as well as the needs of the local economy.

**Mr Williamson:** The substantial improvements, particularly in the last two years, in the results in both schools at Key Stage 4 coincide with the extension of our collaboration and shared education into Key Stage 4. This year, 93% of pupils in both schools achieved five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\* to

C. When we look at the percentages achieving five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\* to C, including English and Mathematics, the figures are 77% and 63%.

Both schools are significantly above the Northern Ireland average, and we genuinely believe that the significant improvement in our outcomes has been down to the quality of teaching and learning in both schools, the dedication of staff, the support of pupils and parents and, importantly, the impact of the increased curriculum provision that we have been able to offer, which has been massive.

**Mrs Ward:** To conclude on why our outcomes improved — and were they not improving there would be no point in doing this — it has really enhanced the engagement of young people. They now have a choice that they did not have before, and, in having that, we are meeting their educational and aspirational needs. As a result, there is choice, their interests are provided for, and there are alternative qualifications. They are being taught by subject specialists, because, sometimes, to offer a subject in a small school you have to ask somebody to come on board who may not be experienced and qualified. However, through the sharing, we have been able to share subject specialists and so on. It has also brought about a sharing of good practice, a strong sense of collegiality between the staff of both schools and so on. Ian will tell you how we hope to take it into the future.

**Mr Williamson:** Finally, you may be aware that, in July, we featured in a Department of Education announcement on shared campuses. We are delighted and grateful to be one of three in Northern Ireland. Our proposals are for two core schools and two shared centres — one concentrating on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-related subjects and the other around performance and creativity-related aspects of the curriculum. We also believe that there is a capacity in the shared centres to allow for additional facilities that we could share, for example a library, meeting areas, supporting special educational needs, careers etc.

We look forward with anticipation to moving forward and securing investment to support what we do in Ballycastle. We believe that investment will underline what has been good practice over a significant number of years and will, in essence, be seen as a reward for what we are doing. We feel that, in many respects, it is what the pupils and the people of Moyle demand. You are all invited to visit us in Ballycastle at any time.

**Mrs Ward:** We hand over to you now.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** Thank you very much and thank you for the invitation. It would be useful to see the work that you have done. The previous Chairman spoke very highly of the partnership. I was always a bit dubious, thinking that there was perhaps a north Antrim bias there. However, having read your paper and heard from you, I can see the enthusiasm. I am very impressed by the level of collaboration throughout the schools, including from your governors and school councils. The fact is that it has developed naturally to meet an educational need with regards to the curriculum. I am impressed by the fact that you have seen an improvement in your results, which is primarily what this is about. However, does the model work for you because of your geographical location, proximity to each other and the relative isolation of Ballycastle?

**Mrs Ward:** Undoubtedly, geographical proximity is what you might call an enabler, because it allows children to move to and from schools in a short time. So, yes, that is an enabler, and it certainly makes sharing much more doable and practical. In a sense, our rural isolation is a factor, but not necessarily the case. I suppose that I am saying that I do not believe that that is the only context in which it can work. There is a lot of potential for sharing to meet an educational need, to expand the curriculum either in our type of context or in other circumstances. Long distances and travel times are expensive economically and in lost learning time.

**Mr Williamson:** We are not unique in our geographical circumstances, I have been informed. For example, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) said that there are examples of other schools in similar proximity that may not necessarily have reached the point that we are at. So, while it may not be a one-size-fits-all, I believe that the model that we have in Ballycastle would be sustainable in other communities.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** There is a difference in your enrolment numbers.

**Mrs Ward:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** How do you ensure that it is a partnership of equals?

**Mrs Ward:** That is not easy to do. The whole thing comes from governance and the fact that there is a strong commitment to the concept of sharing. Yes, there is a larger partner and a smaller partner, but both of us would lose if the partnership did not exist. We are codependent. Together, we can deliver the curriculum and the entitlement framework and meet all the other needs; we would not be able to meet all those needs if we were apart. It is in neither of our interests for the other school not to be there. So, from the purely pragmatic perspective, both schools need to be thriving. In a partnership, both schools need to be confident of their own identity and success and proud of their school as well as the partnership. I think that that is what we have managed to do.

**Mr Williamson:** I agree. There is a sense of pride in what we do. I believe that there is a genuine empathy and sense of respect for each other and for each other's differences, which includes numerical differences and the demographic of the community. Being good neighbours and engendering a sense of respect ensures that we are mindful of the need to be equal in reality and of the perception of equality.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** OK; that is interesting.

Finally from me, you have said that it works for you. We are looking at shared education and at integration in the broadest terms. Do you believe that there is a need for a formal, statutory definition of shared education?

**Mrs Ward:** If it is to be a part of the system in the wider sense, that will probably become important at some point in future for policy and funding. In our partnership, we are looking forward with great anticipation to the shared education buildings. If you think about it in respect of law, policy and all of that, there is a gap that needs to be thought about and looked at. If it is to be part of the system, it needs a policy and legislative framework of some kind. In time, out of this could come shared appointments, shared administrative staff etc. We want to avoid duplication but, at the same time, allow for different identities to share and work together.

**Mr Williamson:** From a system point of view, there is no doubt that there is potential to benefit from economies of scale. I have not read it to any great extent, but, given what we know shared education to be and our experience in Ballycastle, we both believe that the definitions of shared education offered by the ministerial advisory group hit the nail on the head and are adequate.

**Mr Craig:** Ian and Barbara, I am going to keep my contribution to two questions because I got told off last week for asking far too many. I listened to you saying that the threat of mutual destruction was really the driver that brought you together. However, I am interested to hear from you what has kept you together. Mutual destruction is a negative. What are the positives that keep you together?

**Mr Williamson:** In the context of my tenure at Ballycastle High School, which is four years as principal and two years as a vice-principal, the policy imperative of the entitlement framework was a factor in moving into collaboration at Key Stage 4. Historically, post-16 collaboration goes back decades. The big positive is the genuine collaboration in building relationships and sharing staff and professional development. That adds value to what we are doing. We have mentioned the potential for economies of scale and efficiencies. It is a genuine sharing of good practice. As principal of a controlled sector school, I believe that we have benefited from our involvement with a maintained sector school. We have benefited from an awareness of the differences in ethos of educational outcome, which I believe to be a driven ethos. We, as a school, have gleaned benefit from that ethos. We have shared, and I believe that Cross and Passion has benefited from us also.

**Mrs Ward:** Yes, it has been about survival, but that is probably the lowest common denominator. Outcomes and seeing that, together, we can provide more opportunities for young people to succeed is probably the biggest driver for us. The cohort of young people who just got their results in August were the first to come through with this enhanced choice. To be honest, I wish that you had been there to share in it. For the very first time, children from the lower quartile of the ability range were coming in proud to have achieved results, instead of coming in, getting results and running away or the results having to be posted out to them because they were so afraid of what they would see. These children had an opportunity to succeed. We were surrounded by young people who were so delighted with their success that they did not want to go home. They were hanging around talking for

hours. It is an absolutely amazing motivator and driver for me personally that, together, we can see young people really gaining from this on the educational front.

I will give you another anecdote from the summer that illustrates it very clearly. Two young women came to me on A-level results day and talked to me as if they knew me. I kept saying to myself, "They cannot be my students. Surely I am not losing my head; I don't recognise them". They were two students from Ian's school who were over to say, "Thank you. We had a great time here. We really loved it. We now have friends for when we go to uni. Your teachers were so nice to us". They felt that it was important to come over and say that to me.

It is about the friendships that have developed between the young people, the better educational outcomes and the fact that I have come to know the Protestant and unionist community much better through my engagement in the process; that is equally the case the other way round, and it is there for the young people too. Our parents are confident in the choice that they are making about the type of school, yet there is meaningful and authentic sharing going on.

**Mr Williamson:** I agree. That is a big thing that we have seen. Yes, we have indicated that educational need was the priority in driving this, but I have to say that, from my perspective, the icing on the cake is what I believe to have been a very obvious societal and community benefit from our engagement, namely the rapport and relationships that exist between pupils. We are always mindful of the differences, and we take it from one day to the next. However, I think that there is a genuine feeling among all our stakeholders that what we do is making a difference and that we are playing our wee part.

**Mr Craig:** I know from talking to Mervyn, our previous Chair, that there is a lot more positive in this than there ever was negative. I am glad that you have drawn that out.

Touching on that goes to the heart of my second question, which we were thinking about earlier. The children are drawn from different cultural backgrounds: one school is predominantly nationalist/republican, and the other is predominantly unionist/loyalist. How do you explore explaining the cultural differences to each so that there is a mutual understanding of their backgrounds? How do you deal with that issue?

**Mr Williamson:** We talked earlier about things growing organically in the school. Systems and networks have developed over the years. There were curriculum developments such as Learning for Life and Work and around citizenship. Work has been done in that area over the years. Although we are not involved in pupils sitting in collaborative classes at Key Stage 3, a lot of work is done through workshop activities and joint events. We have been involved, for example, in the North Eastern Board PIRCH (partnership, inclusion, reconciliation, citizenship and history) programme and PEACE III programmes. A lot of foundations have been laid at Key Stage 3 through programmes like that. We also do in-house programmes to develop those relationships at Key Stage 3.

We have worked, historically at sixth form and more recently also at Key Stage 4, on developing induction programmes. We put a lot of work and effort into making sure that those things are explored in the early stages of a new term and pupils are made aware that we are different and that you do not have to hide that. It is about being respectful and having an awareness that we are different but moving forward together. Having used the expertise of organisations such as the former Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, we have gleaned our own expertise and increased our capacity to work through that with young folk. I believe that that is nurtured through the ongoing development of relationships. However, you cannot take it for granted. The danger is in thinking that you are sorted. You are not. You have to work hard at it and be mindful of what is going on in a community. Something that happens can have repercussions, so you keep an ear to the ground, your finger on the pulse — all of the clichés — and you react quickly to any circumstances that come to the fore.

**Mrs Ward:** We are very mindful that most of the children's attitudes and values, particularly as they relate to our particular political context here, are nurtured at home. We cannot take for granted the values and beliefs of any child. So, the induction programmes in year 11 and at post-16 put some of that on the table, and there are some quite open discussions. Our experience is that these young people are able to have discussions that their parents, the previous generation, could not, and that includes me. We were of a generation who did not speak about such things in polite company. That is changing, so these young people are helped, enabled and prepared to go into a cultural context that is quite different from their own and to see that as non-threatening in any way, shape or form.

**Mr Craig:** I promised that I would ask no more questions. I wish you all the best in your efforts. I think that you are doing a fantastic job.

**Mr Lunn:** Thanks very much for your presentation. Straight off, I want to say that I am really impressed by what you do. I already knew a fair bit about your work — you could not be friendly with Mervyn Storey and not know about it.

Both schools are strong to start with, although I know that, numerically, you are slightly different. You each have a good record, a good financial position and plenty of confidence in your school. There is no threat to either school or from either school, which must have played a big part in this being readily accepted. You say that the partnership has grown organically and grown out of the necessities of the curriculum. For me, that is a genuine starting point for sharing, and I thoroughly approve. Frankly, the way that it seems to have developed in your case reduces my slight scepticism of sharing as a concept because, clearly, it works. What interests me is the pupil engagement: if it does not lead to societal benefits, I slightly query it. Beyond curricular activities, do you have activities outside school hours that both sets of pupils join in? If so, what are they?

**Mr Williamson:** One of the most recent, which we started through our involvement with the shared education programme with Atlantic Philanthropies and Queen's University, was the development of a joint rugby team in junior school, at Key Stage 3. Ballycastle High School is traditionally a hockey school, and we wanted to develop rugby, so the two schools are working together on that. There is a range of extra-curricular activities, not all of them related to sport. There is drama sometimes and a whole range of joint music activities. There are also more informal arrangements and anecdotal examples: for instance, the sixth form formals have a good attendance from pupils from both schools now, so that relationship has developed as well.

**Mrs Ward:** Friendships.

**Mr Williamson:** Yes, friendships have developed, too. I am conscious that the formalised relationships around sport etc are positive. Music is very strong, with a joint choir and so on, and we have a joint student council. There is a range, and not all are sustained from year to year. Some go on from year to year; others crop up from time to time. If something happens, we will promote it and push it on.

**Mrs Ward:** You mentioned rugby. We had a great event last year, the very first rugby match on Cross and Passion soil. That was a great day for us. Pupils see the hockey team or the hurling team go out, and they realise that this is sport. For this generation and these particular young people, that is all there is to it. They share classes with boys who play rugby or hockey. Equally, boys and girls from your school share classes with our pupils and know people in their outside life who play other sports. All those sorts of things are slowly breaking down. We tell pupils that they can express their cultural identity and can be who they are. It is about really getting to know each other and accepting the richness, as opposed to the threat, that that brings.

**Mr Lunn:** That is very impressive, particularly the school formal because that is a voluntary activity. If your pupils are managing to mix at that level, I suppose the natural question is this: have you had any marriages yet?

**Mrs Ward:** No, but we have had to manage some fallings-out. A small thing that the local business community noticed was that, for many years, the high school children did not circulate in Ballycastle town. Now, with the growth of the sixth form, the sixth formers are comfortable with each other and real friendships have developed. At lunchtime, the sixth formers from both schools are allowed to go into town, and they go together. That happened because the high school students went to Ian and said, "The Cross and Passion students are allowed to go downtown at lunchtime, and we want to go with them". That was the first time that a couple of hundred young people from both traditions were together in our local cafes, shops and so on, which was great to see.

**Mr Lunn:** I think so, too. When the Committee went to Limavady a couple of years ago, it was noticeable there as well. A number of schools there are quite close together, and you could literally see the kids mixing in the street. How far apart are your schools?

**Mrs Ward:** The width of a road, whatever that is.

**Mr Lunn:** I wish you well. It is a terrific example of what can be achieved. I would love to come up and see it.

**Mrs Ward:** You are very welcome to do that.

**Mr Kinahan:** You are an example to us of how to do things. I get the feeling that it is the energy of you two and, presumably, of all the teachers that really makes it work. I am intrigued. You talked about economies of scale, but, presumably, there has been quite a cost. The briefing paper states that one of you has a small deficit, the other a small surplus. Did it cost a lot to get you to where you are, or did you manage to get there within fairly tight budgets?

**Mrs Ward:** The entitlement framework funding has been crucial in allowing us to add to the curriculum and, equally, in allowing and facilitating the coordination that is needed to share. That is the same for any school trying to deliver the entitlement framework in partnership. Other funding through shared education has allowed us to be innovative and, in a sense, to trail-blaze a bit. It has allowed us to unpick collaborative leadership and examine what that means; to think about what quality looks like in a shared education setting; to develop our senior leaders wearing their collaborative hats; and to look at school structures, school policies and school development planning.

In a sense, the school development plans for both schools, certainly as they pertain to attainment, teaching and learning and improving outcomes, have to be one and the same, or broadly similar. It has taken a lot of additional effort on our part and on the part of our teachers — heads of department, pastoral leaders, senior management and principals. All had to take a step outside their comfort zone to develop the structures, protocols and policies and to look at accountability and so on, all of which are needed to make the partnership work.

**Mr Williamson:** In earlier generations, the extent of collaboration was such that funding was not as critical. It was more of an exchange, and people were happy just to do it. However, it is imperative for us to sustain our current level of funding into the future. In particular, entitlement framework funding has been an absolute imperative for us. We believe that the question of whether something comes out of the common funding formula to support shared education needs to be given a lot of thought. It is a valuable resource.

**Mr Kinahan:** That is why I raised it. I think that we should look into the common funding formula in detail. You mentioned how well things are working with businesses and universities. Ballycastle is slightly off the main road, but that is about to get better. How far afield were your business links? Do many students go on to university, not necessarily only in Belfast or Coleraine but across the water? Are you getting all the help that you need from businesses? What can the Committee do to encourage the business and university link?

**Mrs Ward:** Young people are going to local universities and to Liverpool, Glasgow, London and Manchester etc. More and more young people want to engage in post-16 education formally in school, so the number taking HNDs and foundation degrees through the further education route is increasing. Local employers are very concerned that the young people are able to go further afield to university and feel that our two schools really need to look at and provide the skills needed in the local economy and provide well-educated, confident young people who will stay in the area. We are the biggest employers in the town. After us, you need to look to Coleraine and Ballymena, so there is a fair exodus of cars from the area every day. However, we have the local rural community, local farms and so on.

**Mr Williamson:** Our experience, as with any school, of engaging with local businesses for a range of educational visits etc has been very strong. A lot of the bigger employers in the broader hinterland beyond Ballycastle have always been supportive. In my experience of working with folks in the private sector and business world, you have only to ask, and they genuinely will come up to the mark and support you. Hot air and a lot of chat do not always go down too well with them, but, if we have a request, they will meet us. That has been our positive experience locally and slightly beyond the Moyle area.

**Mr Sheehan:** Thanks, Ian and Barbara, for your presentation. Like everyone else here, I am very impressed by what you have done. I do not want to rain on your parade — what you are doing is excellent — but I know Ballycastle well, and it was not a hot bed during the conflict. In Ballycastle, there were not the same fault lines in society as there were in other places, so I wonder whether what



is happening in Ballycastle is transferable to other areas where the conflict and fault lines were deeper.

You talked about a partnership of equals. All good partnerships are based on the ability of the partners to compromise at times. You have not discussed any area on which either school had to compromise. Has that happened? Has there been a need at any stage to compromise?

**Mrs Ward:** At a purely practical level, we have had to compromise on the independence of the two schools to run their timetable and their school day exactly the way they want to. We had to agree, and both schools had to move on very practical arrangements such as the timetable, the beginning and end of the school day and holidays. Previously, both schools did that independently. For Ballycastle High School, for example, Lammis Fair was a school day, but our school was always off. Those compromises are on organisational and, in a sense, fairly mundane things, although they are very precious to people, too. In a sense, both schools have had to be mindful of the greater good when having to change holiday arrangements and so on.

There has been no compromise on the quality of education. We work to a common purpose, and there is no necessity for educational compromise of any description. We cannot operate as two completely independent entities, but there is nothing of real significance that we have had to compromise culturally, educationally or in any other way.

**Mr Williamson:** At a micro level, in the context of departments working so closely together on an educational basis, there has been compromise on deciding which examination board to work with.

**Mrs Ward:** Day-to-day things.

**Mr Williamson:** Compromise happens at the level of deciding what is the best way forward and agreeing a strategy for that. There will be more such compromise at that level.

As to whether what we do is transportable to areas where conflict has been a bigger issue, I cannot speak beyond my experience in Ballycastle, but the majority of our pupils do not come from Ballycastle; they come from a surrounding hinterland that has, perhaps, a different political outlook from that of the local demography. We deliver a quality product, and we believe that that is overarching. Parents want their children to go to a good school, and I think that, if what we are doing ticks that box, it gets over any such hurdles. That is our experience.

**Mrs Ward:** We have talked a lot about guiding principles and what we believe: the core values of our partnership, our mission and what we are really trying to achieve. However, our guiding principle is that when it comes to compromising or making a change, it is not about your school or my school or who did what first; it is about what is best for these young people. If you never deviate from that, you will never go far wrong. It is completely pupil-centred, and any compromises or changes are considered on that basis. That is how we do it.

**Mr Williamson:** It is need-driven.

**Mr Sheehan:** I agree with that sentiment. I was interested in Trevor's question about extracurricular activity. I know that Cross and Passion College and Ballycastle in general have a strong tradition of producing good hurling teams. Is there a facility, for example, for a student from Ballycastle High School to play in a hurling team for Cross and Passion College or a student from Cross and Passion to play for the hockey team at Ballycastle High?

**Mr Williamson:** Interestingly, last week, three of our sixth form pupils were playing with hurling sticks at lunchtime on the green. I became a little apprehensive about the health and safety aspect rather than any political aspect. I said, "Look, fellas, you are not wearing any facial protection, and we need to deal with that".

**Mrs Ward:** That is slowly happening.

**Mr Williamson:** It is just nurturing. We have had pupils who played in hurling teams because it was their personal choice. One of my first memories of coming to work in Ballycastle High School was walking into a sixth form study and seeing a hurling stick and a hockey stick side by side in a corner. I thought that that was very symbolic of what we are doing. It is not forced. Nothing is forced.

**Mrs Ward:** It is not forced at all. There is a lovely, quiet, under-the-radar acceptance of each other's traditions, which is what we really want. Nothing is forced. Very often, young people are more ready to make moves than their parents, grandparents or teachers were.

**Mr Williamson:** They look at the sporting skills. A good hockey player will have good hurling skills and GAA skills are transferable to rugby. It is on that level that they are experiencing other avenues that are opening up to them.

**Mr Sheehan:** You talked about the improved educational outcomes over the past couple of years. Any experience I have gained from this Committee tells me that, usually, when schools perform well, it is as a result of good leadership. I get the impression, although perhaps both of you are being modest, that the reason for the improved educational outcomes is your sharing experiment. Has any research been done, or is there any evidence to point to improved educational outcomes being a result of sharing or the result of good leadership on your part?

**Mr Williamson:** I think that I mentioned that I believe that the increased sharing in meeting the entitlement framework has been a significant part of that, along with teaching and learning and a focus on robust self-evaluation in both schools. The focus and agenda driven by Every School a Good School have also been an imperative for us.

**Mrs Ward:** The leadership dimension is crucial. When I was preparing the paper that I sent you and looked at enablers, that was the very first thing I thought of. It is about the partnership being strong and all the mutual respect and trust etc.

The leadership side is crucial. People have to believe in it, be prepared to take risks and be confident enough to make mistakes and learn from them. It is challenging and we have both developed. In the overall professional challenge to me, it is the biggest aspect of my leadership role. I still learn every day, and it has certainly brought my level of thinking to a higher level. I now have to think much more widely and deeply.

A combination of leadership and the increased opportunities has brought about the outcomes. You have to be willing to give this a go and see the benefit of it.

**Mr Williamson:** Leadership at all levels in the schools — at teacher and middle-manager level — is critical. That has to be initiated with open relationships that are based on trust and mutual respect at a professional level, never mind at a religious or system level. It is about giving people the space to develop those relationships. That is critical in developing trust.

**Mr Rogers:** Barbara and Ian, you are very welcome. This has been so refreshing. You have talked about leadership at every level, but the enthusiasm, drive and passion that you have shown tells me that leadership at the top is key. Well done for that.

One line of your report that jumped out at me was that sharing goes beyond the classroom. Will you tell us a wee bit about your journey and how you brought parents along with you? That is a key factor.

**Mrs Ward:** Anecdotally, I met a person at a conference on sharing — I think that it was an ETI conference. He came up to me at the end of the meeting and told me that he had been a pupil at Ballycastle High School in 1966 and studied A-level Latin in Cross and Passion. That is how far back this goes. From that perspective, there was always a tacit acceptance that this was part and parcel of life in Ballycastle.

Curriculum 2000 was the next big step. Do you remember when applied and general subjects had parity? The entitlement framework was the big driver after that.

By and large, parents want their young people to do well, want good educational outcomes and want their children to engage in, love and be happy at school. When it comes to subject options, it is made very clear to parents that we are very proud of the sharing and that it can really enhance their children's educational experience. We present it as an opportunity and something that will enhance the experience, rather than making excuses for it or worrying about it.

We know that some parents could have an issue with it. Parents from both schools freely come and go. I have seen a Ballycastle High School parent meeting a teacher in my school. For parent-teacher

meetings, my teachers go over to Ballycastle High School and, on other occasions, parents come and meet teachers in my school.

Parents have a choice. With the system we have, children from Ballycastle High School do not have to go to Cross and Passion, and my children do not have to go to Ballycastle High School. They can choose from a menu of subjects in their own school, if that is what they wish to do. Parents are very comfortable with it, but we have not taken that for granted either. That has to be managed, and there have to be people meeting and greeting. Ian comes across and makes sure that his parents are OK, and I know that, when parents from the high school are in my school, I need to make sure that they are OK and so on. When you give young people a good experience, almost all parents are happy to go along with that. We have not presented people with a new big thing and told them why we want them to buy into it. It has just happened.

We have done evaluations with parents. They have done questionnaires, surveys and focus group discussions with us. We get very good feedback, and, although some of it asks whether we could have done some things better, nobody has said that it should not happen.

**Mr Williamson:** The context of the history of the schools is also important. Barbara mentioned that it goes back a significant period. I had a strong sense of the stewardship of continuing on a process that has been developed over many years by predecessors at a senior management level, and I hold that dearly. Parents have respected the groundwork that has been done over many decades, and the Ballycastle community has benefited from that.

A key part of it for parents is that it is not forced and that there is a choice. It has not been my experience that parents do not want to engage —

**Mrs Ward:** I have never experienced it.

**Mr Williamson:** — but, if they did not want to engage, nobody would force them into doing so. That is critical.

I go back to the point that I made earlier. Parents are confident that it works and that it will lead to their children achieving whatever it is that they want to go on to do.

**Mr Rogers:** I am impressed by another statement that you made in your report, which is that your curriculum meets the needs of the local economy. How does it meet the needs of the farming community, for example?

**Mrs Ward:** We offer BTEC agriculture at GCSE and A level. On top of that, we are very mindful of the agrifood business having huge potential in the local area. We are in the midst of planning an educational visit to Harper Adams University, which will be done jointly. The local young farmers are also involved with the agricultural teachers, and so on, and that is also cross-community.

We are very mindful of our home economics, our food technology, our farming course and the BTEC science courses. There is a plethora of courses that those young people could do. There is agricultural mechanics, agricultural technology, agricultural marketing and all of that. We hope to open the minds of young people from the rural community to looking at the range of different courses and employment opportunities in farming, the allied food industries, agricultural mechanisation and all the environmental-type activity on farms.

**Mr Williamson:** We also offer a BTEC countryside environment course collaboratively. That has been developed over the past number of years and supports the wider context of the environment and tourism in that part of the world. We believe that that also feeds into the agricultural side of things.

**Mr Rogers:** My final question is about major challenges. I think that you may have mentioned it already, but is entitlement framework (EF) funding one of your major challenges?

**Mrs Ward:** If EF funding goes, it will be a challenge for all schools to continue partnerships and the entitlement framework. It will be extremely difficult to maintain the choice and all the work that needs to be done to provide a quality curriculum and a quality experience for young people.

There are hidden things. For example, the year heads of all the year groups meet to talk about children's problems, absenteeism, who has fallen out with whom and who is sick. Those things need to happen. Another layer needs to happen to allow the partnership to work and thrive.

**Mr Williamson:** We have mentioned our hope to see investment in shared buildings. That is critical in practical terms, for symbolism and for investing in what we do up there.

I suppose that the other potential challenge at all levels of the school that we are managing and are mindful of is succession planning for staff and changes in relationships that have been nurtured and developed. You would have to start that off again, because that is a key part of the success. In my mind, it would have an impact on buildings, relationship-building and succession planning.

**Mr Rogers:** Thank you. Keep up the good work.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** Three more members have indicated that they want to ask a question. I ask for brevity. I apologise for that, but I am conscious of the time.

**Mr Newton:** I only want to say that I do not believe that this would have happened were it not for the enthusiasm that both of you have demonstrated today. This can only be good for Northern Ireland, for the pupils and for all our futures.

All my questions have been answered, Chair. I suppose that you will really have cracked it if you get to having one school formal as opposed to having two school formals.

**Mrs Ward:** It would mean that we did not have to go to two. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Newton:** Indeed, with all the problems that they present, I imagine. Like others, I congratulate you and encourage you to keep up the good work.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** I know that I said to be brief, but I did not expect you to be just as brief.

**Mr Hazzard:** Welcome, folks. Apologies that I missed the start of your presentation. I want to ask a wee bit about the theory behind the concept of sharing. There are those who suggest that sharing in itself is a just reward and that the process of sharing is an end in itself. There are those who say that it is a staging post on the way to one school in Ballycastle, for example. How do you see it? How do you think your community sees it?

**Mrs Ward:** At this time, our community is ready for what we do. Were you to move faster or more deeply than your community can cope with, you could end up with one or other school or one or other community feeling very alienated, and so on. The strength of our partnership is that it offers parents the choice of a faith-based education or not. That choice seems to be very important in the community at the moment. That is out there and is working at present. We are mindful that it could be a journey in the end. Who knows what will happen? However, to intervene and make it something else at present, you would need to neutralise the environments and all of that. When my children walk over into the high school, there is symbolism such as the roll of honour of the dead from the wars, etc. My children just accept that. There are religious symbols in my school. People just accept it. There is a real richness in that, and it would be a great pity to do anything that could damage that or end the lovely community cohesion that is growing out of it.

**Mr Williamson:** This is about good neighbours working together. We are educationalists and leaders of schools. We are not involved in some social engineering exercise. That is important to state. We believe that our communities, through our governors and from everything else that we hear, believe that both schools want to retain their own ethos, identity and definitely the mutual respect for each other and each other's community.

**Mr Hazzard:** You mentioned symbols and the problems of having to neutralise or assimilate anything. Have specific incidents come up from different classrooms or different people?

**Mrs Ward:** No. We are hypersensitive about it, and I continually question myself on not only how I feel about something but how others will see it and how my school community will see it if I say something. It is really challenging, and I have learnt an awful lot about myself and about working in a

much wider context. With young people, I have never had an instance of any haeres being raised or worries about anything that they have seen or experienced. Have you?

**Mr Williamson:** Obviously, we are mindful of it, and our care and consideration around it permeates what we do, and I think that pupils sense that and can see it. Pupils will know what is important to you, no matter what aspect of school life that is. Therefore, they know, you hope, not to step over a line or action will be taken. In my experience over six years, it has not been an issue. The greater issue potentially has been, if there have been any issues at all, more around the quality of teaching and the results. Are pupils getting what they need to get on elsewhere? Those are the real issues. We have moved beyond symbolism issues. They are there. Both schools have their history and traditions and their community involvement. We are good neighbours, and we respect that, but nobody is rubbing anybody's nose in anything.

**Mrs Ward:** Our guiding principle — again, we have talked about these things — is always that it is OK to express who you are as long as that is not done in any way that is offensive to anybody else. We and our young people have had to think about that and make decisions based on it. Those are not always easy decisions to come to in the end — you do a lot of soul-searching. However, the bottom line is what is good for children, how we can express our difference, and how we can show outward symbols of our identity that are in no way a threat or show any form of disrespect to our partners.

**Mr Williamson:** We have engaged previously with workshop activities and things like that as part of the Peace III funding and the North Eastern Board's partnership, inclusion, reconciliation, citizenship and history (PIRCH) project funding. Work was done around that. They came up with some very creative ideas combining school emblems and symbols to create something very energetic. It is not a real issue. We cannot ignore it, and we are mindful of it, but it is not a huge issue.

**Mr Hazzard:** I have one quick final question. I am always keen to stress that we need to look beyond just religion and that sharing should be about socio-economic backgrounds and especially ethnicity, where appropriate. Does your example touch on different socio-economic backgrounds in the community?

**Mr Williamson:** Absolutely.

**Mrs Ward:** Absolutely.

**Mr Williamson:** Both schools —

**Mrs Ward:** The joy of working in our context is the experience across the community divide and, probably as important, the social inclusion. We have everybody from the exceptionally advantaged to the extremely disadvantaged in both our schools. That is the joy of the job.

**Mr Williamson:** Increasingly, we have pupils of different nationalities coming in as well.

**Mr McCausland:** Thanks for your presentation. I endorse the view that we should be incremental and appropriate. A particular way that works very well in one place may not be exactly right in another. You end up with a messy situation where it is not exactly the same. It does not fit into a neat little box where it is the same everywhere. However, that is probably by far the best way forward.

I want to pick up on one thing that is in the core values. In the paper that you provided, which is very helpful, you say that this "Embraces the richness of difference". Can you flesh out what you mean by that a wee bit?

**Mrs Ward:** Embracing the richness of difference is what I have just been talking about. Take the two sports, where you celebrate and share the difference. You see it as enriching that there are different ideas and activities, people with different views and beliefs, and a different sense of their history, their future or whatever. When I talk about embracing that, I mean that you should allow it to happen. Facilitate that and educate young people to see it as a positive as opposed to a threat. What I mean by "embracing it" is "accepting it". View it as your life having been enriched by the fact that you engaged in something that you did not know about before as opposed to us saying that it could cause problems, and, as a result, not allow them to do this, that and the other. That is what I mean by embracing that richness.

**Mr Williamson:** It is exactly that. We are not trying to morph our pupils into something that they are not. Every individual is different. We are allowing for that and embracing it, and that is a key factor in what we do. It is not being diluted, but it is all done in the context of a genuinely developed relationship in which you do not go out and wilfully annoy, upset or antagonise your neighbour.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** Thank you once again for your time this morning. I think that all members found it very interesting. We applaud you, and we look forward to our visit to Ballycastle.

**Mr Williamson:** Thank you.

**Mrs Ward:** You will get the most insight into it when you meet the young people and talk to them. That will be a very useful exercise.

**The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen):** Thank you very much.

**Mrs Ward:** Thank you very much for the opportunity.