



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Shared and Integrated
Education: Professor Colin Knox and
Professor Vani Borooah, University of Ulster

15 October 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Education

Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education:
Professor Colin Knox and Professor Vani Borooah, University of Ulster

15 October 2014

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (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:

Professor Vani Borooah	University of Ulster
Professor Colin Knox	University of Ulster

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Gentlemen, I welcome you to our Committee this morning. You have had the benefit of hearing our previous witnesses. I ask you to make your opening statement, and then Committee members will ask some questions.

Professor Colin Knox (University of Ulster): Chair, thank you very much for the invitation to share some of our research on shared education and integrated education. We are going to keep this fairly brief, in the sense that we are just going to walk you through the key points in our paper, which is, we apologise, slightly longer than a briefing. I will talk a little bit about definitions, the extent of segregation or parallel systems and the demand for integrated education.

My colleague Vani is going to look at school performance in the integrated sector. I will then talk a little bit about the shared education model. Vani will talk a little bit about the quantification of the shared education experiment, if you will. I will finish by talking a little bit about where shared education is going. That probably sounds lengthy, but we will keep it very brief.

Linked to your terms of reference, particularly on definitions, it is now very clear in legislation what integrated education is. It is defined in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 as the:

"education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils."

On the back of that, there have been various attempts to define what "shared education" is. The definition that is most often quoted is the one in the ministerial advisory group context. One of the MLAs referred to that earlier. The scope of what is referred to as "shared education" is actually a lot broader than the scope of integrated education, because it refers to all section 75 categories. It talks

about shared education being aimed at improving educational benefits, promoting efficiency and effectiveness of resources, promoting equality of opportunity — my colleague Vani will return to that in a moment — and promoting good relations and equality of diversity. Therefore, shared education has been given a very broad scope, and we are going to try to unpack that a little bit.

It is fair to say that shared education is not radically new, in that the Bain report in 2006 referred to iterations of shared education, such as federations, confederations, shared campuses and shared faith schools. However, I think that the impetus for shared education has been given a huge boost by the shared education programme run by the Fermanagh Trust, Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB). One crucial point that we want to make about a definition of "shared education" — this has been picked up by the Minister — is that it involves two or more schools. That is a central principle that we might want to return to later.

In the most recent judgement on integrated education, Justice Treacy is very clear — it has been picked up in the debate in the Assembly and has some ramifications for how we define it — that integrated education cannot be delivered by schools within a:

"predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant ethos".

In other words, it is seen as a stand-alone concept. That has created greater clarity around what integrated education is seen as by the system, and by the Department and stakeholders therein.

"Segregated" is a pejorative word, because it could suggest that there is statutory segregation: there is not. I will give you a few brief statistics to remind you of the extent to which we have parallel systems of education here. In our primary sector, 6.2% of Catholics attend controlled primary schools, 1% of Protestants attend maintained primary schools and 5.7% of primary-school children attend integrated schools. The same is true as you go through the system, where 2.8% of Catholics attend controlled secondary schools, 1% of Protestants attend maintained secondary schools, and 14.9% of secondary non-grammar-school children attend integrated schools. Overall, you can see that we essentially have two parallel systems of education, although it is true to say that Catholics are much more likely to attend schools in the controlled sector than Protestants are to attend maintained schools. The greatest movement by Catholics is into the controlled grammar schools.

I will move on quickly to integrated education. We will look at shared education a little bit later. It is true to say that the impact of integrated education tends to focus primarily on reconciliation and societal benefits. Much of the research that has been done into the impact of integrated education is about the meaningful contact that takes place between children in that one-school environment and the fact that that creates much more accommodation between those children. The sustained contact is very much at the core of integrated education as a product, if you will.

I will look quickly at the demand for integrated education. The detail is in the paper. The Education Minister said that one measure of the demand for integrated education is the extent to which parents express first preference on the application transfer form for schools in that sector. It is true to say — I echo some of the words the Minister said in response to a question on this — that, in the integrated movement overall, the number of places available in the primary and post-primary sectors slightly exceeds demand, although there is pressure in particular areas owing to parental preference. Our table shows that, overall, we have about 2,000 unfilled places in the integrated sector. In and around 21,000 pupils attend schools in the sector. To put that more specifically, in 2013-14, 3,230 parents expressed a preference for integrated schools. The actual approved numbers available in integrated schools is over 3,500 students. In the round, the sector is undersubscribed by about 9%. We have given some examples of the top three and bottom three primary and post-primary schools based on supply and demand.

I will hand over to my colleague, who will talk a little more widely about some of the education outcomes from the integrated sector.

Professor Vani Borooah (University of Ulster): Thank you, Chairman. I am a professor of economics at the University of Ulster. My colleague and I are honoured and privileged to be speaking to you today. Thank you very much for inviting us.

I will start off by talking about school achievement and performance, because that is the thing that Colin and I have been very concerned with. Our measure of school performance is five good GCSEs, including English and maths. If you look at Northern Ireland's measure of performance, you will see that there is a hierarchy of performance that is defined essentially by three parameters: deprivation,

gender and religion. At the top of the heap are Catholic girls from non-deprived backgrounds — 77% of whom get good GCSEs — and at the bottom of the heap are Protestant males from deprived backgrounds or free school meal children, about 20% of whom get good GCSEs. There is a gap of almost 57% between these two groups. The interesting question is this: how much is due to gender, how much is due to religion and how much is due to deprivation? We have performed that calculation. On our calculation, 10% is due to religion, 22% is due to gender and 68% is due to deprivation. Understanding why free-school-meal pupils do not do well in school is a very important aspect of our research.

Until now, this was all we knew. We knew results at a Northern Ireland level, but recently DENI has released data to us showing the performance of free-school-meal children in GCSEs on a school-by-school basis. I believe that this data is not widely available. We are among the first to have analysed it, and we have analysed it for different schools. If you look at figure 2 in the briefing paper, you will see some results. Free-school-meal children in the non-selective sector do best in Catholic maintained schools: 23% get good GCSEs. They do worst in controlled and controlled integrated schools, where around 12% get good GCSEs. They do slightly better in grant-maintained integrated schools, with 16%. So, generally, there is something about Catholic maintained schools that allows free-school-meal children to do well.

If you look at the intake of free-school-meal children, again, you will see that the Catholic sector takes the largest proportion. In the secondary non-selective sector, it is nearly 32%, whereas the other sectors weigh in with 23%, 24% or 25%, so there is a big gap in the intake of free-school-meal children between Catholic schools and other schools. Similarly, if you look at the grammar school sector, you will see a big gap between the performance of free-school-meal children in Catholic ethos grammar schools and Protestant ethos grammar schools — 88% and 80% — and also in the intake of free-school-meal children between Catholic ethos grammar schools and Protestant ethos grammar schools. Nearly 10% of pupils in Catholic grammar schools are free-school-meal children; but only around 5% in Protestant grammar schools. There is something that we need to investigate and understand there.

We have also done this analysis on a school-by-school basis. Contrary to popular belief, free-school-meal children do not always do worse than non-free-school-meal children. There are 22 schools in Northern Ireland in which the performance of free-school-meal children is at least as good as that of non-free-school-meal children. We list these schools in table 6. It is not necessarily the case that, simply because you come from a deprived background, you will do worse than someone from a non-deprived background. There are also 23 schools in which the gap between free-school-meal children and non-free-school-meal children is within 10%, so a gap exists but is very small. Again, we list these schools in table 7.

At the other end of the scale, there are 68 schools in which not a single free-school-meal pupil got good GCSEs including English and maths. There are 68 such schools. These schools cannot even report a single pupil getting this particular qualification. We do not list these schools, but let me say that 30 of them were controlled, 25 were maintained, 10 were integrated and three were Protestant grammars. This is the sort of information that we are now able to provide to the Committee, which previously was not available. It is thanks largely to DENI, which provided us with the data.

We have also investigated first preferences of pupils. We asked what determines first preference. Why do people put down a particular school as being their first preference? Seventy-seven per cent of the variation in first preferences is due to school performance. This is the thing that parents look at, and it echoes something that the people from Ballycastle were talking about at a school level. We find this also at a Northern Ireland economy level. What really motivates parents is school performance. Schools which perform well have greater demand than places, and schools which do not perform well have unfilled places. If we want to improve upon the imbalance between schools, we need to improve the performance of schools which, at the moment, are underperforming.

This is my first pass at these quantitative figures, and I want to make to you the point that it is very important to understand why free-school-meal-entitled children underperform, why they perform better in Catholic maintained and Catholic grammar schools than in other types; and why Catholic schools are prepared to take more free-school-meal-entitled children than schools in other sectors.

Professor Knox: Again, very quickly to allow time for questions, I suppose that our central thesis is that performance is the key imperative in the selection of schools by children, and in that sense we think that the integrated sector could do better. Look at some of the statistics: the controlled integrated sector is a very poorly performing sector, and I think that that drives parental choice in

terms of those schools. We think that, whilst the reconciliation societal imperative is at the core of the integrated movement's *raison d'être*, and that is clearly a very important issue, it is not what drives parental demand in the first instance. And you heard, I think, very eloquently from the school principals that at the heart of their schools is the desire to achieve the best performance that they can for their children. Those other issues around identity are safeguarded; there is respect; and so on. And in that way, almost by osmosis, there is a softening at the edges of some of those relations.

That is where, very quickly, we move into shared education, which is really an attempt to do that. We could not articulate that nearly as well as the two school principals that you have just heard. However, at the core of the shared education model is this idea of creating interdependencies between schools, and at the core of that is good collaboration. All the MLAs asked good questions about what makes for a strong collaboration. Is it good leadership? Is it good direction? Do you have parental support? All those things are key to it. The research evidence in other parts of the UK, particularly in England, says that you have schools where there is a potential for mutual benefit, particularly on the education side — and I stress "mutual benefit"; the schools are benefiting from each other. By dint of the geographies of our schools here, and the fact that competition tends to happen within sectors, shared education is more likely to be beneficial where you have two or more schools of different management types and the end goal is to improve education outcomes.

Professor Borooah: If I were to highlight one characteristic of shared education, Chairman, it would be that it is nimble and agile. Muhammad Ali, the boxer, had this famous phrase:

"float like a butterfly, sting like a bee".

I think that that is shared education for you. To make my point, we studied four partnerships which were set up through Atlantic Philanthropies. The first was at the highest level of intellectual ability: astronomy, led by Lumen Christi College and involving Foyle College. There were not enough pupils in either school to do astronomy, so they grouped together, employed somebody and did astronomy. Again, there was the same partnership for engineering. There were not enough people in Foyle to do engineering, so they came over to Lumen Christi.

At a slightly lower level, there was a partnership between Belfast High School and Hazelwood College for remedial teaching of mathematics. At a different level, there was a partnership between Shimna Integrated College and primary schools for teaching foreign languages. Belfast Model School had a different partnership. In some ways, this illustrates the fact that there is no formulaic method of sharing. You can share depending on contingency and need, ranging from astronomy to civics, foreign languages etc.

We evaluated the kind of benefits that might result from shared education. The essential point that I want to make is that, at the margin, it lifts the performance of certain students. Pupils who would not have got good GCSEs get good GCSEs, people who would have got good GCSEs go on to do A-levels, and people who would have done A-levels then go on to university, so it is like a rising tide. It lifts boats and, at the margin, pupils do better with shared education than they might have done in its absence.

What are the benefits of this? From studies, we can tell that there are rates of return to education. How does it benefit you if you get five good GCSEs compared to only four GCSEs: what additional impact does that make to your lifetime income? We used these results over a 40-year lifetime, and we figured that, with these four very modest programmes, if you netted out the cost, you would get a total benefit of nearly £24 million for four very small programmes that lifted the performance of these pupils. If that was magnified on a larger scale with the same agility and nimbleness, the results could be enormous.

Professor Knox: Finally, Chair — I am sorry that we are taking a bit longer than I anticipated — I wanted to talk about where shared education is going conceptually. I do not think that it is a particularly useful conceptual method to set shared education alongside integrated education. We do not see them as competing. It is really about where communities are at. There are two principles that we are talking about. It is not a one-size-fits-all model. You have to be highly sensitive to the needs of communities.

As to your question about interface areas, perhaps there are communities that are very different places to rural schools in Ballycastle, and that is what makes it messy, to use Nelson McCausland's phrase. Having said that, I think that there is a real opportunity to take this forward now with the

shared education signature project that has just been recently agreed between OFMDFM, the Department of Education and Atlantic Philanthropies. They are setting education goals at the heart of that programme. There is a great acceptance within that programme that schools are starting off at very different stages and that their incremental development will be very different.

At Queen's University, Dr Gavin Duffy and his colleagues have developed a very useful continuum that really says, let us see where schools are at in this continuum of sharing, if you like, from working in complete isolation right through to great interdependence between these schools. I think that it is that journey that the shared education signature project is trying to develop in an incremental way. Perhaps one of the dangers of it is that because, as the two principals said, this is hard work, we revert to type and see it as no more than a community relations programme. I do not mean that in a derogatory way, but to get the buy-in for parents — to get that huge incremental change that we want — education outcomes will hopefully be at the heart of that programme.

Thank you very much.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Thank you very much. I find your paper very interesting; the analysis, along with the very clear tables. I know that you are saying that shared education and the integrated sector are not in competition, but there are very clearly defined boundaries between the two, and we have got very clear camps as well. I am not sure whether you could say that there is hostility there, but there is certainly uneasiness there. Perhaps one would perceive that the other is trying to steal its clothes, but there may be an issue around definition.

I look at the information that you have provided, and — I know this from my own experience of school life, too — parents choose schools because of their educational outcomes and, as a result of that, an unintended consequence of that is mixing. Look at schools such as Belfast Royal Academy (BRA), Methody and so on: there is a very clearly mixed community within those schools, probably more so than some of the schools that would consider themselves to be integrated. Are we at a stage that we may perhaps need to look at redefining integration, rather than looking at a clear definition of shared education?

Professor Knox: I see on your schedule colleagues from Queen's, including Professor Joanne Hughes. She has done a very interesting piece of work. I will not pre-empt it or claim to know about it in the detail that Joanne does, but she refers to "super-mixed schools", which is the type that you just referred to. Indeed, in our paper, right at the back, we give examples of schools where there is a broad mix of pupils, but which would not necessarily call themselves shared schools or integrated schools.

At the moment, integrated schools define themselves very much as Catholics, Protestants, no faith and other faith all educated in one building. Shared education is quite different to that in the sense that it is not about structural changes and having a separate integrated school. Rather, shared education can take place in existing schools, and it is about those two schools trying to learn from each other, as the two principals described earlier.

As the debate evolves, we may need to revisit what we mean by shared education. However, at the moment, that definition is quite clear and it is about two or more schools coming together for the purposes of improved educational, economic and reconciliation outcomes.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): I want to go back to the comments that you made about integrated education. You said that, in the mix, there is an overall undersubscription of around 9%. However, the IEF LucidTalk poll showed that somewhere in the region of 79% of parents would back a move to transform their children's school and 66% believe that integrated schools should be the normal model. Is that a misunderstanding of integration? Should the definition be more inclusive of the other models you have outlined?

Professor Knox: I certainly think that polls sometimes mix the terminology and, therefore, the people who are answering those questions get confused. It goes back to the point that we made earlier about what informs parental choice. Ideologically, people can say that they welcome attendance at integrated schools, but the evidence tells us that their choice is informed by educational preference, rather than whether it is an integrated school. If it is an integrated school and it is an integrated high-performing school, parents will send their children to it based on that.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): The point is about the type of question that is being asked. If you are asking someone on the street whether they would prefer their children to be in a mixed community and whether they should perhaps all be educated together, of course they will say yes. Does that necessarily mean the integrated model?

Professor Borooah: Yes, we would like our children to be educated together, conditional on good results. That is the critical point. If we are to enunciate any rule it is that if you can deliver good results, people's hearts and minds will follow. The examples that you took, BRA and Methody, are de facto integrated or mixed — call them what you will. Parents do not hesitate to send their children to those schools, simply because they get good results, and that is what they put first.

Good results are the horse and reconciliation and putting children together in the same classroom is the cart. It is very important to put the horse before the cart in this particular respect. If we want any sector to flourish, whether it is the integrated sector, the controlled sector etc, we have to give primacy to educational results. Once we give primacy to educational results, a lot of things will follow. However, if we ignore education and look for anything else, I think that we will miss the basic purpose of schooling, which is to deliver good education.

Professor Knox: The Ballycastle example illustrated that perfectly. In combination, those two schools have achieved educationally more than they could have done individually. That is what makes that experiment or, if you like, opportunity very important for children and parents in that area.

Mr Craig: I am not at all surprised at your outcomes. I am a parent, and we are all guilty of this. You look around and find the highest-achieving school or the one that seems to get the most out of their pupils and that is where you send your children. There is no rocket science in that.

The other thing that I was not at all surprised about in your report is that the maintained sector seems to be the least integrated. I am not at all surprised. It is a faith-based education system and, therefore, is singularly focused on one faith — integration is not really a big factor for it. Looking through the statistics in Northern Ireland, I was not at all surprised to find that practically no other faiths or dominations go to that sector. Does that not lead to the point that the argument should be about a more shared focus around this? The maintained sector is one of the biggest sectors in Northern Ireland. I have to be honest and say that it is probably one of the best-performing sectors as well. Lessons need to be learned from that. If that is the case, should we not focus more on the shared aspect of that than on the integrated sector? Let us face it: if the largest sector of all is a single faith-based thing, we will not get to integrated overnight.

Professor Borooah: No. We can point to several instances in which there has been sharing with the Catholic sector. There has been sharing between Lumen Christi College and Foyle College, and between Belfast High School and an integrated college in that partnership. So, in several instances, without surrendering identity, people are prepared to share if they feel that they will be a concomitant improvement in educational performance.

Professor Knox: To illustrate that, Queen's, again under Dr Duffy, has provided a very good example in Derry/Londonderry between St Mary's College, St Cecilia's College and Lisneal College. The whole basis of that partnership was mutual benefits for all three schools. Lisneal College had not performed well in some school inspections. St Mary's and St Cecilia's came into help with that, and they improved their educational outcomes. In turn, St Mary's and St Cecilia's benefited a lot from some of the pastoral work that was going on in Lisneal. That is an example of mutual respect and reciprocity in benefits.

I also think that it is about maintaining their own identities, and the two principals from Ballycastle made that point very clearly. There are lots of parents in our society who are still not at the point that they want to send their children to integrated schools, and you have to respect that. I do not think that there is any argument against saying that we want to share if it will provide our children with better education outcomes and, as a consequence, we can promote better reconciliation and societal benefits.

Mr Lunn: Thanks again for your presentation, both written and verbal.

This is the first meeting in this programme, and it is deliberately titled "shared and integrated" rather than "shared versus integrated". A lot of people keep saying "versus", but we will educate them. I will

not spend the next six months advocating for one sector or another. You heard what I said about the Ballycastle experience — that is good stuff.

You seem to be saying — Colin, I think that it was you in particular — that integrated schools perhaps do not perform quite as well because they spend too much time emphasising societal benefits. That is the way that it came across. Surely that is nonsense.

Professor Knox: That is nonsense, and, of course, I did not say that. I said that they do not perform as well as other schools but not because they concentrate on reconciliation benefits. If the integrated sector is to raise its game, it has to become attractive to parents on the grounds of educational outcomes.

Professor Borooah: This is definitely not an ideological war of this versus that. We have a common interest, which is that we want Northern Ireland to have good schools and we want children to turn out with better qualifications than they currently have. The question is how best to achieve that. We can go only by the facts, which are that some schools underperform and some schools perform better than others. Without detailed analysis, we do not know why some schools underperform. We have undertaken some analysis, but we do not know in detail. We know, however, that we could learn from the experiences of others. Can we learn something from people who do well, and do we have anything to offer? That is the heart of shared education. It is a learning process, which has a single objective: to deliver a better future for our children.

Professor Knox: Maybe we tend to describe it in a trite way, but a rising tide floats all boats. If the maintained sector is doing things well — we know that because of their results profile — why should we not share that common interest to ensure that all our children do well? The mechanism for doing that is shared education.

Mr Lunn: I will stay on the theme of poor performance. You made the point — we have crossed swords on this before in Enniskillen, I think — that integrated schools perform poorly at GCSE level; in fact, they perform as badly as the worst-performing sector, which is controlled and non-grammar schools. Figure 1 of your briefing seems to indicate that grant-maintained integrated schools perform at GCSE at the same level as Catholic maintained schools, so they outperform controlled and non-grammar schools. In every sector, there is a variation.

Professor Borooah: Two integrated schools are very popular — Slemish and Lagan College — and they operate a selection policy. There are 15 such grant-maintained integrated schools. If you take out those two and Drumragh, 12 schools certainly perform below par. It is a highly skewed performance, with three highly performing schools and 12 schools not performing so well.

Professor Knox: The results are skewed because of the integrated schools that stream their children. That is not particularly the principles to which the integrated movement espouse. They do not support selection.

Mr Lunn: It is true to say that most of them, by a wide margin, do not operate a selection policy. In fact, there is no reason why they should not. Not exercising a selection policy is not a condition of becoming an integrated school.

I have just one more question, Chair — there are 100 questions in here, but time does not permit —

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): The Chair would not permit.

Mr Lunn: You effectively said that there is limited demand for integrated education and that there are unfilled spaces. How do you contrast that with poll after poll that seem to indicate something completely different? The biggest problem is that parents who would like to send their children to an integrated school cannot find one that is available.

Professor Knox: That is geographically patchy. I do not think that that is the case across the entire Province, otherwise we would not have 9% unfilled places in the integrated sector. So I do not think that that is a general point.

Mr Lunn: What is the percentage of unfilled places in the other sectors?

Professor Knox: I do not have those figures available.

Professor Borooah: There are unfilled places in all the sectors. We are not singling out the integrated sector.

Mr Lunn: I speculate that it is a lot higher than the other sectors.

Professor Borooah: I think that it varies a great deal on a school-by-school basis. It is 8.5% in the integrated sector, but if you take out the top three integrated schools, you will find a much larger proportion of unfilled places in the remaining 12, certainly in the controlled integrated sector. Similarly with the controlled and maintained sector, you will find schools for which there is a high demand depending on high performance, and schools for which there is a low demand depending on low performance. If there is a single conclusion, it is the fact that, if you lift performance, you will lift demand.

Mr Lunn: You made an interesting comment about the first preference situation. Is it true to say that a lot of parents put down as their first preference a school that they have no intention of sending their children to? It comes into the area of bus passes and the distance from a school. If you do not put down the nearest schools, you will not get a bus pass. Does that have any influence on your 79%?

Professor Borooah: Our data is on the number of first preferences on a school-by-school basis, so it is not detailed and is not micro data; it is at a fairly broad level. Even that very broad level suggests that school performance has a very big impact on first preferences, but it is not the only factor. We do not say that it is the only factor, but we think that it is a significant and important factor.

Mr Lunn: You have given us a good grounding and context for the inquiry, so I am sure that we will come back to it again. Thank you very much.

Mr Hazzard: Thank you; it is very thought-provoking work. As I go through it and listen here today, I cannot help but think that social mix is important in a school. I do not accept the phrase "super-mixed schools". I think their level of intake of free school meal pupils spurns that. What would be the educational benefit of putting a Protestant boy from a deprived background in a classroom beside a Catholic girl from a non-deprived background?

Professor Borooah: Let me start by saying that it is not necessarily the case that free school meal children do worse than non-free school meal children.

Mr Hazzard: I accept that.

Professor Borooah: There are 22 schools. What are those 22 schools doing that enables them to deliver these qualifications to free school meal children that 68 schools are not able to do? What are they doing right? What are 22 schools doing right and 68 schools doing wrong? There is an element of what we can learn from each other. There are also peer group effects. You and I may come from culturally different backgrounds, but when I see that you can solve a differential equation better than I can, I acquire a certain respect for you. When I acquire respect for you as a person, I acquire respect for your background. Similarly, if you see that I do something better than you do, and you respect me for that, you think, "Maybe his background is not that bad after all". My view is that the key to respect is not to respect a person in the abstract but to respect the person and, through that, to respect his or her origins. By putting people together in shared education you learn that, if this person is good at that, and I am good at that, maybe we are alike in some ways.

Mr Hazzard: You could take a certain angle from the report, as you could with any report, but the statistics suggest that the social mix in the Catholic sector is better than the social mix in the controlled sector. Is that a determinant factor? Does that play a role in why there are better results for deprived pupils in the maintained sector?

Professor Borooah: Catholic schools do something that makes free school meal children in maintained schools, grammar and secondary, perform better than those in other sectors. We do not know what it is. When you investigate further, you find that absenteeism in maintained schools is lower than in other sectors. Absenteeism has a major role to play in school performance. Without going into anecdotal sociology or psychology, there is something there, and I have been meaning to find out what that is.

Mr Hazzard: I have one final question. Were you able to find out what measurements parents use when they are deciding on a school, based on the outcomes? Is it A levels, GCSEs or the fact that you need a transfer test to get into that school? Is it because there is a culture of a school being a good school? You often hear parents say that a particular school is a good school, but you think, actually, it is not a good school. It may have been a good school, but it is no longer a good school and vice versa: there may be schools out there that are good schools now but are not perceived to be so.

Professor Borooah: Those parents will be looking at first preferences and at the previous year's performance. It is contemporaneous and not based on the past. It is not reputational but is based on hard evidence. We are not saying that other factors do not matter, but performance matters.

Professor Knox: Performance matters significantly. It is a very good question about what constitutes educational performance. We tend to use the standard measures that DE uses, because we have quantification of those, but parents may take a more rounded view. It might be that there are also very good sporting activities, that it is a very good place to go, that it is local, that the parents went there etc.

Mr Newton: I thank Professor Knox and Professor Borooah. You indicated that you are moving forward on the OFMDFM shared education signature project. The Assembly is moving forward on the Education Bill. I am not alone in being critical of how we conducted area planning in the past, which was not done as effectively as it could have been. Does your work have any relevance to the area planning that will be undertaken by the Education Authority? Have you been involved in or asked about that work?

Professor Knox: We presented to the Committee previously on area planning. At that stage, the area plans for the primary sector had not come out; the final plans came out only recently. When we examined the plans, we put it, simply or perhaps crudely, that the area planning was not composite. Essentially, CCMS and the boards did their own thing, consulting with the integrated sector and the Irish-medium sector, and they then cut and pasted the plans into something that they called a composite plan for an area. I looked at the area plans for the primary sector recently, and I do not see a significant change in that philosophy. Indeed, it has been criminal — maybe that is too strong a word — and there has been a very negative perception from those who engaged in that process as parents and as part of a community. A lot of the suggestions that came forward were, essentially, ignored by CCMS or the boards. How does that help us with shared education? The Minister advised the boards and CCMS to be creative and imaginative with area plans, and they have been neither. If they are to embrace shared education as part of the way forward, they need to be highly cognisant of that when they develop area plans. Developing area plans on a sectoral basis will not do that.

Mr Newton: Am I right in saying that your work will inform the strategic planning of DE and the education and library boards or the new authority?

Professor Knox: It would be too presumptuous to think that our work would inform anything, but we will certainly make our evidence available to the Department and appear before whomever it wants us to and try to disseminate our work as best we can.

Professor Borooah: In the earlier presentation, a point was made that geographical proximity is very important for partnerships. De facto, the way in which geographical proximity works out in Northern Ireland is that it is inter-sectoral. In the area where I live, within half a mile of one another, there is Aquinas, which is the top-performing grammar school in Northern Ireland, Wellington College, which has medium-level performance, and St Joseph's, which is the worst-performing secondary school in Northern Ireland. There is enormous potential for partnerships that are waiting to be uncovered. We have simply scratched the surface: we have uncovered four partnerships from our work. You heard about Ballycastle. Hundreds of partnerships are waiting to be uncovered, but spirit and energy are needed to do that. I think that the enthusiasm is there, but it needs to be harnessed and channelled.

Professor Knox: Perhaps the signature project will provide the mechanism to do that. Support must be provided to those schools, because this is a new journey for them. As the two principals from Ballycastle will tell you — you have been to Limavady — this is a long journey. It does not happen overnight, and it is risky. They have to take decisions that they may not always like in the interests of that common good. That is a journey that the Departments are now embarking on, and it is good to see that, for the first time, the Department of Education is putting money behind it. Equally, OFMDFM

is convinced that this has the potential to improve the performance of education and to reduce the performance gap between children who are entitled to free school meals and others.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Mr Lunn wanted to come in on that. Can I ask you to be brief?

Mr Lunn: You mentioned Aquinas and St Joseph's. What was the third school?

Professor Borooah: Wellington College.

Mr Lunn: Imagine me forgetting that. You say that St Joseph's is the worst-performing secondary school in Northern Ireland.

Professor Borooah: I think that it is.

Mr Lunn: Is the solution to that a sharing arrangement, or does the school need a good shake-up, which would have happened in the past? Surely it is down to the leadership.

Professor Knox: We do not say that sharing is the panacea for improving educational outcomes. We say that it is one factor therein. You heard the two principals talk this morning about good leadership, teaching and curriculum development. This is not a one-shot option, but we think that it is an important component in improving education outcomes.

Mr Sheehan: Trevor has stolen my thunder. I keep banging on about good leadership in schools, because you hear educationalists talking about it all the time. I am sure that everyone on the Committee knows of schools that have had a change of leadership, and performance has improved. It is not rocket science. The evidence shows that, in some schools, kids on free school meals can perform as well as those who are not, and, in other schools, they are not performing as well as them. As a start, I would look at the issue of leadership. Is there good leadership in the school? Is there quality teaching in the school? Is there good monitoring of teaching staff? I know of some terrible schools that have been on the point of intervention, if not in intervention. Anecdotally, we hear about poor teachers, lazy teachers and teachers out on sick leave, but, when a new principal comes in, all that can change. I know of one case in my constituency when, after a new leader came in, GCSE results improved year-on-year. When we talk about the 60-odd schools in which the kids on free school meals are underperforming —

Professor Borooah: Not a single school got disqualification.

Mr Sheehan: Is leadership not the first port of call? I understand and believe, from the example that we were given this morning, that sharing can certainly enhance educational outcomes, but if we are going to list priorities, leadership has to be at the top.

Professor Borooah: Yes, but if I were a departmental policymaker, I would find that leadership involves many problems: individuals, schools and micro issues. At a departmental level, I would look for easy answers, which include school numbers and financial difficulties. In fact, those things make not the blindest bit of difference to school performance, but, from a policy point of view, it is easy to find those quantifiable, macro factors, on which you can pin policy, whereas I absolutely agree that to pin policy on leadership is the right way to go. However, it requires much more effort on the part of policymakers to investigate leadership in individual schools.

Professor Knox: Anecdotally, we hear that one of the suggestions as to why Catholic or maintained schools outperform controlled schools is that CCMS has a much stronger grip on leadership in its schools. The boards are perhaps a little semi-detached in dealing with schools that are underperforming.

Clearly, leadership is hugely important, and, as the principals said this morning, that goes for leadership at all levels. Perhaps it takes a leader to create or cascade that downwards, but it is about leadership at middle management level, good teaching, shared education — there is a plethora of issues that are about raising educational performance.

Mr McCausland: I apologise for not being here for part of the presentation. I have a quick point. Your briefing has a graph that shows the figures for performance in the different sectors. You may

have already answered this question when I was out of the room. We might guess that the better performance of grant-maintained integrated schools over controlled integrated schools is to do with schools that were controlled schools and then transformed into —

Professor Borooah: Controlled integrated schools?

Mr McCausland: Yes. Is that because they were not doing particularly well previously?

Professor Borooah: I do not know.

Professor Knox: I do not know either, but there is a very derogatory term that one could use. I do not wish to label those schools, but sometimes, when schools are at the edge of viability, they have what is sometimes referred to as a "deathbed conversion". I have said it, and it is on record; I am sorry. That option becomes a possibility for them, and I can see why schools would choose it, so that may have implications for their performance.

Mr McCausland: Thank you. I have not heard the phrase used in that context before. That is good.

My second point is about the reason why the Catholic maintained sector seems to do somewhat better. There is the issue of leadership, and there are anecdotal stories and comments about that. Is any research being done on that? You said that it should be done.

Professor Knox: I am not aware of any specific, in-depth research on what is commonly referred to as the "Catholic ethos". When you ask principals about that, they tend to say that Catholic schools do well because there is a Catholic ethos. So you then ask, "What is the Catholic ethos? What is the package that makes that performance, in the case of grammar schools, marginally better than in the controlled sector?". It is more difficult for them to answer that question.

Professor Borooah: We are among the first to have drawn attention to this fact in a systematic way, in the sense of maintained schools versus controlled schools, Catholic grammar versus Protestant grammar, and intake of FSM students in the secondary school sector and the grammar school sector. This systematic exposure of inequality in performance has been our modest contribution.

Professor Knox: The next step is maybe of greater interest. We have exposed the problem, but how do we interrogate its nature? It probably requires a lot more qualitative research than we have been able to do.

Mr McCausland: I certainly agree. I know that the role of CCMS is only a suggestion. If schools are underperforming, there is probably more support and pressure from the Church to intervene than with a controlled school. I agree with that, and I hope that research is done.

My final brief point is about free school meals entitlement and the correlation with educational disadvantage. Does that suggest that free school meals entitlement might not be the best possible or most accurate way to assess the need to target additional support? We put in additional financial resources on the basis of free school meals entitlement, but does this not question that?

Professor Borooah: Free school meals entitlement may not be the perfect measure of deprivation, but, even if you had an idealised measure of deprivation, there would be a strong correlation between the free school meals entitlement and that idealised measure. One might spend an excessive amount of time defining what deprivation really is rather than trying to investigate, even on this crude measure, why children do not do so well.

Professor Knox: We know, from talking to school principals — again, this is anecdotal, and we have not researched it — that kids in one sector are perhaps a little more reluctant to classify themselves as being entitled to free school meals than kids in another sector, and that has implications for resources both into the schools and in how they are assessed for their performance band.

Professor Borooah: I will give you one example. In London, there is hardly any gap between children who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not. The people who undertook this study found that one reason for this is that many children in London who are entitled to free school meals have immigrant parents, and, in the first generation, there is a lot of parental pressure to do well

at school. That is an important aspect. It is not just about deprivation or poverty but about what is happening in a house.

Mr McCausland: It would suggest that there may be an overemphasis on financial disadvantage.

Professor Borooah: Yes.

Mr McCausland: That is another issue that needs to be researched or looked into.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Thank you very much for your presentation and your paper. As members mentioned, it will be a very useful tool for us as we move through our inquiry.