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FROM: VERONICA BINTLEY
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Date: 24 September 2014

To: Mike Nesbitt MLA
Chair to the Committee for the Office of the
First Minister and deputy First Minister

INQUIRY INTO BUILDING A UNITED COMMUNITY

1. I refer to your letter dated 7 July 2014 inviting individuals and organisations to submit written evidence to an inquiry into Building a United Community.
2. Please see attached submission from the Department of Education.

Veronica

VERONICA BINTLEY
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SUBMISSION TO OFMDFM COMMITTEE BUILDING A UNITED COMMUNITY INQUIRY

Introduction

1. The Department of Education (DE) welcomes the focus on building a united community as a means of tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance as set out in the Executive's Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy.
2. Rebuilding a strong and vibrant society is a role for the whole of Government, but there is a valuable contribution that education can play and one that must be achieved if the next generation is to learn from and avoid the mistakes of the past.
3. There has been a long history of community relations work in schools and youth organisations throughout the period of conflict, from the formal public statement in the early 1980s to the Department's most recent Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education policy introduced in 2011.

4. Curricular

The early years, schools and youth work curricula provide ample opportunity for addressing sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance. Within school settings, the minimum curricula content for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at primary level and Local and Global Citizenship at post-primary level, requires schools to actively address issues of sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance. Similar opportunities are provided in the Curricular Guidance for pre-school education through Personal, Social and Emotional Development.

Additionally, at post-primary level, the minimum content for all curricular areas includes 'developing pupils as contributors to society' providing opportunity to address citizenship and cultural understanding. The Youth Service has a long history of addressing community relations and diversity issues through the model of youth work practice that includes equality, diversity and independence as part of its core values.

5. Policy

- 5.1 The Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education policy seeks to support and underpin the curriculum and other policy areas. The specific aim of the policy is to improve relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self-respect and respect for others, promote equality and work to eliminate discrimination.

- 5.2 The policy provides formal and non-formal educational opportunities for children and young people to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions. Funding is provided through the Education & Library Board's CRED Enhancement Scheme to schools and youth work settings, as well as through the Youth Council NI to regional voluntary youth organisations. Guidance was issued to early years, schools and youth work settings in 2011 and a dedicated website provides information, case study material and resources for practitioners.
- 5.3 Funding is also provided through the policy to ensure teachers and youth workers have the necessary skills to address community relations, equality and diversity issues, including handling sensitive and controversial issues. A significant number of teachers have availed of the training to date.
- 5.4 A formal review of the policy by the Education & Training Inspectorate is scheduled in 2014/15, to assess its impact and to inform future policy implementation and development. As part of the monitoring indicators, the Department commissioned a module within the 2012 Young Life and Times Survey, the results of which suggest the policy was having a positive impact on attitudes of young people. The module is due to be repeated in the 2014 survey.
- 5.5 The CRED policy is therefore a key enabler to some commitments within the T:BUC strategy, in particular the development of an anti-sectarianism module and associated teacher training and the buddy scheme. Proposals on how the CRED policy can facilitate these commitments have been made to OFMdfM officials.
- 5.6 Other educational policies, such as Special Educational Needs and the Newcomer policy also assist in addressing the needs of young people and building support for their integration into society.

6. Shared Education

- 6.1 In addition, the Department is leading on the Programme for Government Commitments to advance shared education as a mechanism to improve educational and reconciliation outcomes. The Department welcomes the recognition given to shared education within the Executive's T:BUC strategy.
- 6.2 One of the headline actions in the T:BUC is a commitment to commence ten Shared Education Campuses in the next five years. Work on developing the new campuses is being taken forward by the Department of Education under the Shared Education Campuses programme.

- 6.3 The T:BUC Shared Education Campuses initiative is seen as complementing the work already underway in schools and will be targeted towards infrastructure projects aimed at improving or facilitating educational sharing initiatives within local schools. It is intended therefore that projects selected will build on a solid foundation of existing sharing.
- 6.4 The Education Minister, John O'Dowd, launched the Shared Education Campuses programme in January 2014. There was a significant level of interest in the first call for Expressions of Interest to the programme, with sixteen applications received. The Minister announced the first three projects to be supported under the programme on 1 July 2014 and the projects are proceeding to the planning stage. It is anticipated that a second call for Expressions of Interest will open towards the end of September 2014.
- 6.5 There may be additional ancillary benefits arising from the establishment of these new facilities, including increased opportunities for use by the wider community for a range of educational, sporting, recreational, arts or cultural activities, in line with the Department's *Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools*.

7. Integrated Education

- 7.1 In addition the Department has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. It responds to parental demand, and funds integrated schools that are robust, do not involve unreasonable expenditure and meet specified criteria. Integrated education, together with all types of education, makes a vital and valuable contribution to building a peaceful and stable future for our children. Going forward, the Department of Education will ensure that it continues to have a rigorous approach to its duty to integrated education.
- 7.2 The Department's vision of ensuring that every learner achieves his or her full potential at each stage of development is supported through the Sustainable Schools strategy Policy and the area planning process. Both promote the need for a vibrant and sustainable education system. A strong education system has the potential to play a positive role in the normalising of society and promoting greater sharing amongst communities.