



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Primary Integrating/Enriching Education
Project: NEELB/University of Ulster Briefing

22 January 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr Chris Hazzard
Ms Maeve McLaughlin
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Robin Newton
Mr Sean Rogers

Witnesses:

Mr Ray Gilbert	North Eastern Education and Library Board
Miss Jayne Millar	North Eastern Education and Library Board
Dr Aideen Hunter	University of Ulster
Dr Alan McCully	University of Ulster

The Chairperson: I welcome to the Committee Mr Ray Gilbert, the senior education officer at the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB); Miss Jayne Millar, the assistant senior education officer at the NEELB, who will brief the Committee on the primary integrating/enriching education (PIEE) project; Dr Aideen Hunter, the lead on evaluation and research at the University of Ulster; and Dr Alan McCully, a research coordinator at the school of education at the University of Ulster. You are all very welcome. Thank you for taking the time to come and see us.

Ray, do you have a few opening comments? The other witnesses will be able to make contributions, after which we will have questions.

Mr Ray Gilbert (North Eastern Education and Library Board): Thank you, Mervyn, and members. We thank you for the opportunity to attend this morning and share our experience through the PIEE project. I am delighted to have our colleagues from the University of Ulster here for their external evaluation of the project. Members have been provided with a paper, and I hope that they have had an opportunity to read some of the background and experiences in it.

I want to draw attention to a few things about our experience of the project. The PIEE project sat within the context of, and was embedded in, our vision in the North Eastern Education and Library Board and our previous work in cross-community and cross-sectoral work. We have now moved on in relation to the Department of Education business plan objectives and the Programme for Government targets for shared education, but we believe that our work on PIEE is significantly tied into both. I pay tribute to the work that went on through the PIEE project, which was led, on a day-to-day basis, by my colleague Jayne Millar. I will draw out some of the things that we believe to be unique features of

PIEE, going back to remembering a number of years ago when the project started. One of the key features that we felt contributed to PIEE's success was the preliminary and ongoing work that was done between the different school authorities. We had a steering group that involved all the major school authorities working together through PIEE's processes. We felt that that contributed significantly to its success.

I think that one of PIEE's distinctive features was its very local nature. We are very aware of a lot of work that has been done in schools over the years on community relations and of the different types of project that have gone on. However, one of PIEE's distinctive features was that we were bringing together young people who lived in the same village and who met each other on the street, as opposed to linking with a school 20 miles up the road for activities once every so often. This project was very much about the local community.

We also had a particular focus not only on the young people but on broadening it out to the governors and parents. Certainly, that can be exemplified by a number of partnership events that I attended. It is most heartening to recall attendance at a particular concert between two of our PIEE schools where the parents were together, the children were together and young children of six and seven years of age were singing their school song, which, in fact, was the partnership song. It was very effective for the relationships, and you could see how it had permeated the whole community.

I think that another distinctive feature was our strategic decision to focus on small schools. Very often, small schools will struggle to get involved in significant initiatives, and they face particular challenges. PIEE was initially embedded in curriculum and learning. With the challenge of the revised curriculum and so on, we were very conscious, in our broader role as a board, of supporting our schools, particularly in small rural communities, so that they could provide the full range of educational experiences for young people. There is no doubt, we believe, that the focus in PIEE on working together and on staff working together enhanced the opportunities that are available for those young people.

We also saw the effective use of technology. Of course, in a situation of building relationships, face-to-face and ongoing contact is very important. However, we felt that the effective use of technology, through videoconferencing and other factors, was very useful in that it kept the link going and helped to build overall sustainability.

In the latter part of PIEE, one of the most distinctive features was the concept of the shared teacher. Teachers were appointed jointly between schools from different management authorities. We had a significant amount of work to do to get that on the ground, but certainly we saw a lot of benefit from it, having piloted and then extended it.

There was a distinctive focus on building sustainability. One of the most pleasing things, from our point of view as a board, is that, although the funding for PIEE is over, the relationships are not over and the schools are still working very closely together. Many of them are looking at projects, such as the shared education project that has recently been announced as a way of maintaining and developing their links.

Another of the features that we felt worthy of drawing attention to was the whole focus on staff development and staff working together. Again, the isolation of the small school was a factor, and we were very mindful that the curriculum in the small school is, quite rightly, the curriculum that every other school is dealing with. However, when you have two, three or four teachers trying to do all that work, it is quite challenging. So, we saw evidence of teachers working together. Furthermore, very distinctive work was done with teachers, particularly in the early stages of the project, about developing relationships, working together and helping them to build those partnerships. We felt that that was very important.

I will move on to some of the key learning which we felt emerged from the project. One of the most striking things that came through was the building of those very strong and sustainable partnerships while maintaining the ethos of the school. In many communities, that is very important. In the broader picture of shared education and integrated education and so on, we are very mindful that different communities are in different places. Certainly, one of the clear things that came through was the ability to build those relationships without sacrificing your school's original ethos. That was not done in any protective way; it was simply acknowledging where we were. That worked very well.

Another important learning feature was that the schools chose to work together. It was not imposed upon them. It was drawn up from the desire of the school, which we helped and nurtured as we went

forward. As the project went through, we were growing the sustainability. We had a strategy to ensure, particularly where building relationships and counterdependencies were concerned, that the project's sustainability was guaranteed.

Through PíEE and the work of colleagues, one other very distinctive feature was the development of resources. One of PíEE's legacies is that there are documents charting the success of building partnerships that other schools can now use. Those hard-copy resources are available on our website. Another distinctive feature was the use of our in-house television network. There are a number of PíEE-related programmes on NEELB TV, which is an Internet-based television service that is available worldwide. Some of the guidance materials and journeys have been charted in small five-, seven- and 10-minute video pieces where people can get a distinctive sense of how to take this forward.

We felt that the context of rural education and the contribution through schools working together were important. We refer in the documentation to the gradient of partnership potentially moving right through to federation. We have a very rural context in our board area.

The other key learning element that we want to draw your attention to is that children, communities and education were at the centre at all times. The benefits to children, young people and broader communities are very important.

The evaluation will speak in more detail, but we felt that real, tangible outcomes could be seen and have been sustained. PíEE was productive. We are very grateful to our funders, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the Atlantic Philanthropies. I think that the most pleasing thing is the continued work that schools are doing, despite the fact that the project is formally completed.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Jayne, do you want to make any comments?

Miss Jayne Millar (North Eastern Education and Library Board): I have nothing further to add at this stage.

The Chairperson: We will try not to refer to individual schools, so in the evaluation, you refer to school A, B and C. Some of us, particularly those of us in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area, are well aware of some of the schools. I am involved with some of them, so I prefer not to identify individual schools. However, we can talk in a general sense about the implications.

We now face a situation in some of the PíEE schools whereby shared teaching, for example, is working well. I went out and saw some of the work that they were doing in a community that had challenges in the past. There was buy-in from parents, teachers and governors. PíEE comes along, raises expectations, does a good job, funding comes to an end, the teacher is gone and the two schools are back into doing what they have to do. However, the Department then comes along and says, "Shared education is a wonderful thing. It is a thing that we all should be doing." The board knocks on the door and says, "Have we any money that we can use to keep that teacher?" The answer is, "No, sorry; it is only capital." It goes back to the point that we made earlier, which is that there is no alignment between the policies, objectives and practice. It is a shame and disgrace that PíEE has financially come to an end, because I saw the benefit of it.

If I have missed this, I stand corrected: the evaluation considered parents, teachers, governors and schools, but was CCMS ever asked about the evaluation of PíEE? That is not recorded. Obviously, the board was the lead in it, so it had a view.

I will be very particular on this. We now have a situation in two schools in particular. They want to go in a certain direction, but the managing authorities — I will put it in that broad context — are saying, "No. You have to go in another direction". That other direction is a closer alignment with a school in their own jurisdiction, as opposed to shared provision. How do we unravel all that in a way that is beneficial to the community, the pupils who attend and the parents who support those two schools?

Mr Gilbert: Perhaps I could pick up on some aspects of that. I am conscious that, when we hear about the evaluation, other points may come through. I suppose, in a sense, as I reported, one of the things that we see on the ground is the ongoing sustainability of those relationships. Obviously, I would be very careful not to make political points —

The Chairperson: Like myself.

Mr Gilbert: Of course, there is an issue around policymaking. Certainly, I think that the key thing that we want to bring through is the learning from the process. We hope that that learning may influence policymaking. However, we are very conscious that it is out of our hands. Certainly, I emphasise the day-to-day and ongoing partnership relationships that are there and, again, the success of the shared-teacher model. Obviously, it is for others to decide how policies are aligned and funding is distributed. I accept your points, Mervyn.

The Chairperson: Aideen, do you want to comment on the evaluation?

Dr Aideen Hunter (University of Ulster): Yes, please. Will I present our paper, and then we will answer questions, or do you just want me to answer questions?

The Chairperson: Yes. That will do, unless any other members want to ask specific questions before we lose the train of thought. It is not that we will not come back to the issue; it is just in case anything else comes out of it. Robin, do you want to ask a question?

Mr Newton: It will maybe be covered in the paper.

The Chairperson: OK. We will hear the paper on the evaluation.

Dr Hunter: I think that some of the sentiments that you expressed will come out in this paper. Hopefully, you all received the paper, which was circulated prior to the meeting. To save time and your sanity, I will not duplicate some of the points that Ray made about what PIEE is and what it attempted to do. I will just discuss our evaluation and the research that we conducted. We did the smaller research and evaluation project. I think that there was also a larger project. Jayne can put you more in the picture about that.

As Mervyn already expressed, we attempted to gather perceptions of PIEE from boards of governors, parents, pupils, principals and teachers and to explore staff understanding of what a partnership model is and what PIEE was about. We also attempted to highlight examples of best practice and evolving practice with a view of transferability from PIEE and post-the life of PIEE so that that could inform other school settings and partnerships and the educational debate that we are having. We further aimed to assess the extent to which staff felt that they had created a shared space in their community and schools, to consider the sustainability of the project, which will be one of our main comments later, to explore schools' utilisation of shared teachers in relation to the logistical issues of how that was managed and to examine the impact of shared teachers on those partnerships.

In our findings on sharing in education, PIEE was successful in contributing to enriching and integrating education, and it had a real and meaningful impact on the schools that it was involved with. The project enabled direct mixing and sharing through shared experiences and collaboration of pupils, teachers and principals. It offered a degree of flexibility in how schools interpreted that sharing. That was one of the project's strengths. There was increased sharing, although obviously to a lesser degree, between governors, parents and grandparents in local communities, and it brought those communities closer together.

Sharing took many forms, such as shared activities, away days, residential, shared classes and joint projects, which you would expect from that type of project. They were very much shaped by the needs of the schools involved and open to individual interpretation by the partnerships about what best met their needs. There was collaborative curriculum and professional development, which Ray mentioned. Another of the project's strengths was that staff in small rural primary schools that had a limited number of staff and people working in a key stage or subject specialism had another professional with whom they could consult and have professional, curriculum and resource development. That fed in to the quality of education that was then provided to children. So, that was a strength.

Shared extra-curricular activities, such as joint productions, shared after-schools clubs and activities also developed in the partnerships. They also fostered cross-community links and skills. They brought the local community together. As you would expect, however, there was a spectrum of sharing across the partnerships, with some engaging more fully than others in the shared activities and practices.

The shared-teacher model was innovative in itself in the broader Northern Ireland context in facilitating liaison between education and library boards and CCMS. However, we did not specifically investigate

CCMS's understanding of or desire for that. That was not one of our remits. The first communication between the education and library boards and CCMS was in jointly appointing a shared teacher. So, that was groundbreaking in itself.

The implementation of the shared-teacher model was negotiated and interpreted in different forms across the different partnerships. Different schools used the shared teachers in different ways to greater or lesser success in furthering sharing in education. Where shared teaching was most effective, it was utilised in delivering shared classes, and there was a two-school partnership that was geographically close, where numbers of pupils were manageable in a shared and combined class. So, the best use of the shared teacher was where schools could physically get together.

Barriers to shared classes obviously included the cost of transport. It is to be highlighted that schools in the rural setting are often more isolated than they are in an urban setting, where you can physically walk children from one school to another, which, for child protection reasons, you cannot do in a rural setting. A further barrier to shared classes was the number of pupils. In many rural primary schools there is no large assembly hall where you can get twice the number of children together in one room. Another barrier was the distance between schools. So, when schools were geographically close, the partnership was stronger and it was easier to facilitate shared teaching.

I will hand over to my colleague Alan McCully, who will explore our recommendations and the issues of sustainability that Mervyn raised.

Dr Alan McCully (University of Ulster): I will keep this very brief. I emphasise the project's contribution to enhancing professionalism among teachers and in establishing very strong links between principals. They in particular were clearly extremely important in providing the momentum for the project to go forward. Again, I emphasise the enhancement to the pupils' curriculum that came out of the project and the unquestionably positive impact that it had on community relations. Ray mentioned not only pupils and teachers but governors, parents and grandparents coming together. People in a small village were making comments such as, "This is the first time that I have ever been in this church hall". I think that such remarks are very significant. There was, if you like, an increase in the shared space in those communities.

In going forward, we have to see the project in the shared-education model rather than in the integrated model. As we interviewed all participants who were involved, it was quite clear that, almost universally, there was a recognition or acceptance that the project existed in existing structures. In many cases, it was a way of preserving those structures but also of developing stronger community links. So, I think that any remarks that we make have to be made in that context. I am not putting a value judgement on either of those perspectives. However, I think that we should be clear that the project was within existing structures for shared education rather than those who participated having a vision of a more integrated education system.

I suppose that that has an impact on sustainability. We did not have a remit to examine the financial aspects of partnership, but it seems to us that the shared teacher has the potential to enhance curriculum and to contribute to two schools in a way that can potentially lead to saving expenditure. However, that does not get over the duplication that exists by there being two schools in relatively small communities.

I think that the shared teacher has huge potential. In most cases, it was used with great flexibility, but there are dangers that, when you label someone the shared teacher and the person responsible for community relations, others tend to back off and see that person as having sole responsibility for that work. There was some indication of that, but, nevertheless, it was quite clear that having someone from another community working in the other's school was an experience that people felt enhanced the activities in the school.

The Chairperson: We talked about buy-in from parents to processes, but your chart in the papers tells us that over 70% of people agreed or strongly agreed with their child taking part in the project. Only 6% disagreed, and only 8% neither agreed nor disagreed. It is quite clear that there was overwhelming buy-in from parents. What if you then set that success against, for example, the Department's community relations, equality and diversity (CRED) policy? Maybe that has not been done, because you did the evaluation of a particular project. How do you see something like the CRED policy having to be amended or changed to make it potentially more successful in the way that PLEE has been, as opposed to what is being achieved or is proposed to be achieved from the CRED policy?

Dr McCully: The answer might lie in your opening comments, in the sense that the strength of that type of initiative is that it is coming from the bottom up and is based in communities. My experience of educational policy generally in the field of community relations is that it very often becomes a tick-box exercise and is about fulfilling certain obligations. However, this had a very genuine bottom-up involvement, because, as Ray said, it was obvious to all that the pupils were benefiting and that the teachers were benefiting through the professional engagement.

The Chairperson: You set out your recommendations from the evaluation, one of which is that the funding that is allocated to rural schools should take account of the financial needs and the savings that are associated with partnership. That is an important recommendation.

Another is that continued funding for transport is necessary for ongoing pupil activities. That is where the issue of alignment comes in. The Department is now doing a transport review. The process in transport is driven — excuse the pun — by, I would say, saving money. The performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) looked at transport, we have board transport, and DE is supporting and underpinning DRD by 45%. That is the amount of money that it gives to it to fund another arm of government. So, you have all that. The drive is to find savings, but a key element of achieving the success of PIEE was to get funding for transport. Is that not just another example of how there is no alignment between what you want to do and how you do it? From a managing authority's point of view, if you had a choice to make, Ray, on saving money, you could do it by saying, "That is not necessary. Those schools can do what they need to do". If this is not seen as core, it will be seen, as the railway between Londonderry and Belfast was originally seen by the Department, as non-core, and, at some stage, someone will come along and want to take it away. Is that the real risk and the real dilemma that we face?

Mr Gilbert: Needless to say, it is a complex issue because, sitting around all of this is a range of policies. Reference was made to the broader policy of area-based planning and the issue around two small schools in close proximity in the same small village. The broader transport issues are critically important as well. On influencing policy, it has been alluded to in the evaluation how positive people were about sharing. I think that there is a need to have a little deeper analysis done around that. As I alluded to earlier, one of the things that I see on the ground is that the concept of building success on a bottom-up model is a very powerful one. I am delighted that Alan has drawn that out. It is not an imposition on anyone, but the consequence of building a bottom-up model is that you have to start from where people are at.

I pay due tribute to all who are working, in every way, to bring communities together, but there is a spectrum. In some places in Northern Ireland, a fully integrated model is a very good one, and, in other places, the model where we come together while maintaining our own ethos and identity is preferable. That brings in the issue of facilitating that to happen. The core piece around all of that is starting from where we are at and recognising and taking forward shared education, communities and children — building for the future by working together.

It seems to me that we should be learning about and building on success, and supporting that in whatever way we can. The difficulty in policy terms, of course, is that that is multifaceted and multicoloured, almost, as you go across the various areas of the Province. I understand and appreciate that it is very hard to strike policy at a general level but that then has to be locally interpreted. That is the dilemma, and it sits with the wider transport review dilemma, the wider area-based planning dilemma and the broader and total context of the most effective use of public funding, which is, obviously, becoming more and more scarce, to the benefit of young people. I keep coming back to that core point.

At the core of one of the great successes here was and is the working together of young people. Again, I do not apologise for referring to events that I have attended where young people from different communities who were standing beside each other did not know that they were from different communities. They were young people working together and doing things together, and one of the lovely things that has come out of this, as has been alluded to, is the concept of people who live almost cheek by jowl in communities but who did not know each other because they were in different parts, coming together and working together. I suppose that the bigger policy issue, Mervyn, is around the shared education policy, which Alan alluded to, and how we pragmatically take that forward to achieve success. That is not easy in policy terms because it is so multicoloured and multifaceted.

The Chairperson: That is borne out by the fact that there were two primary schools in the village that I was brought up in, one of which I attended. I never stood in the other until I was an election candidate and it was used as a polling station. The second time I stood in it was when I was Chair of the Education Committee. I think that that is a sad indictment. That community sits divided, in many respects. Similarly, there were parents who were never in Armoynagh Primary School until this project. This project ignited the creation of something completely different to anything that we had ever had in the village before. It has made a very good contribution. I am very concerned that it will not be built on.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. I congratulate you all. This is a phenomenally important exercise that needs to not just carry on but expand and become part of everything. You probably listened to the session on area-based planning. Ray, the NEELB has been much further ahead on area planning. I imagine that certain aspects would have hindered sharing and others would have helped it. What are the key lessons from this that you have been able to pull together to help with area planning in the board?

Mr Gilbert: I will not repeat all the learning that I have already alluded to, but look at it in a wider strategic context. In the run-in to area-based planning — we will have firmed up our first iteration of the formal primary plan by the end of February — the North Eastern Board engaged with governors and schools prior to our drawing together of the draft plan. From that emerged — in different ways, including reflections on the PIEE process — schools' voluntarily coming together and saying, "We want to come together." It is different in different places, and, again, there is the whole rural context.

We have to be influenced. However, I again stress the ownership aspect of all of this. I have two PIEE schools coming to see me next Friday in the context of area planning and the recent OFMDFM announcement on shared campuses. That has grown out of the success of the engagement here. That kind of bottom-up growth influencing area-based planning has the best chance of success. However, it is complex and it takes time. If you get a quick solution, it is rarely a one that everybody buys into. People have to travel a journey, and we think that PIEE has helped them to do that.

Mr Kinahan: You talked about the shared teacher being absolutely key. When we had the stakeholders' event here, lots of people asked to have a facilitator who really understands how you pull two schools together. Is there something that we should all be learning from those two separate but similar things? Do we need someone who really understands it and helps to pull the schools together and sell the project?

Mr Gilbert: I will ask my colleague Jayne, who was involved very deeply with the shared teacher aspect, to comment on that.

Miss Millar: It is important to stress that it will not happen without the facilitation that you highlighted. One of the legacy items of PIEE has been to provide the resources that Ray referred to earlier. There is, literally, a handbook. Other schools that are interested in developing partnerships with neighbouring schools can pick up that handbook and use the learning from PIEE in their own context.

Dr Hunter: We also advocate that the shared teacher is well-informed of their role and that a strict code of conduct is provided. Different schools had different interpretations of how a shared teacher should be used. Quite often, the shared teachers that were appointed were young and newly qualified. I am not sure whether they would be fully qualified to be a broker, as such. We advocate more that good community relations training is provided for in-service teachers. That is important in developing the partnership, rather than it just being handed over to the shared-teacher unit.

Mr Hazzard: Thanks very much. It was a very thought-provoking presentation. Alan, some of the words that you used were very pertinent. Influential people in the media and everything else sing constantly about integrated education. I have nothing against integrated education. However, here we have an example of participants — teachers, parents and everybody involved — saying overwhelmingly that they do not want an integrated setting but this shared experience. I assume that one influential Belfast newspaper will not cover this story very well, but it deserves to be covered. It is a great "other side of the coin" in the whole debate. Why do you think the participants prefer this shared platform to a transformed integrated setting?

Dr McCully: There are both pluses and minuses to it. As Ray indicated, the project started where people were at. The next question is this: how far can it take them forward? It has, obviously, taken them forward in personal and group relationships. The project was perhaps less strong in addressing difference between people, although, in its later stages, having built those relationships, that potential

was there, and they were beginning to tease that out. The next question is this: how far will those who are engaged in the project be prepared to go in that direction?

In shared education, the glass half-full view is that it builds these relationships; the glass half-empty is the possibility that people will go so far but no further because they are not prepared to come out of their comfort zones. I am not putting any value judgements on that, but that is the sort of policy dilemma that we are highlighting at this stage.

Mr Hazzard: You have spoken about the positive impacts on the wider community and the societal dynamics. On the educational dynamics, do you see an improvement specifically in attainment, as opposed to the wider community aspects of the project?

Miss Millar: The external evaluations have emphasised that the project was successful in enhancing education. As for subject areas in PIEE, we initially asked schools to focus on the arts, the world around us, and personal development and mutual understanding. Those aspects of the curriculum are not measured in the same way as literacy and numeracy. We do not have quantitative data as those were not key subject areas. In a smaller school, it is more difficult to have the expertise among your staff to provide that breadth of curriculum. PIEE provided the opportunity for schools to work together to provide that greater breadth of expertise for young people.

Mr Hazzard: We have looked at the problems of measuring STEM achievement. It would be interesting to see schools coming together to form the critical mass that is able to delve into that. Finally, a point was made about teacher experience and the professional development of teachers. Could you expand on that? Were any quantitative elements looked at?

Dr Hunter: It was mainly qualitative. It was quite a small research evaluation. What we have is what teachers told us anecdotally in interviews. PIEE provided a space for teachers to meet so that they could have curriculum planning, timetable planning and resource and lesson planning timed together. They were able to thought shower — we are not supposed to say "brainstorm" any more — ideas and share resources with one another. They pooled ideas, which helped them with their professional development. Therefore, it was mainly at a planning level. However, some schools, rather than focusing their funding on the children — I do not mean this to sound selfish — used it for teachers' curriculum development and professional development. There were training days and courses for teachers, rather than away days for pupils, so it was a different model.

Mr Gilbert: I would add — it perhaps links back to Danny's question — that one aspect of the programme we felt was absolutely critical was the work that we did on a bespoke programme to develop leadership skills with principals. We worked on a clearly defined programme with colleagues in the Regional Training Unit, because, as we know, leadership is a critical factor in any aspect of business, education, or anything else. In this case, the leadership and direction added to the vision of principals and to capacity that was grown through that bespoke programme, which eventually, by the end, we were starting to drip down to teachers. Again, it is important to emphasise that three years is the blink of an eye in the development of such a process. We recognised the limitations imposed by the time span and we hope, as I said earlier, that we have left a legacy in the things that are continuing and the relationships that have been built.

To pick up again on the teacher aspect, we have had examples at presentation events of teachers from different schools routinely working in partnership as a team. That is a fantastic legacy. It is critical for a teacher in an isolated rural situation who is faced with a wealth of curriculum and assessment demands to at least have someone else to talk to.

Mr Hazzard: There is the idea that we perhaps concentrate on religious or ethnic integration. How much focus was there on socio-economic sharing and on the coming together of kids from more affluent and poorer backgrounds?

Miss Millar: That was not a focus of the project.

Mr Hazzard: At all?

Miss Millar: No.

Mr Hazzard: OK.

Dr McCully: When you are dealing with such small schools and communities, there is a range of backgrounds there.

Dr Hunter: An equivalent range within the two schools; there would not be that diversity, really.

Mr Newton: I thank the members of the panel for coming. Had this happened in my East Belfast constituency, I think that I would be suffering the same obvious frustration as the Chairman. I will pick up on a word that Mr Gilbert, I think, first used when he talked about the programme's "tangible" benefits. Then, to pick up on Dr Hunter's comments, paragraph 42 of your paper indicates:

"PIEE demonstrated that with sufficient drive and vision it is possible to challenge the 'norm' and introduce new ideas even within the perceived traditional school setting."

Will you expand on that and on what those new ideas were?

Then, to pick up on the term that was used in response to Mr Hazzard's question, will you expand on the legacy of the partnership? One of the things in funding projects that greatly annoys me is the frustration that occurs at the end of the project. I have seen that on so many occasions in a community, and in professional bodies. Is there the potential to get over that frustration because of all the good points that have come out of the project?

Dr Hunter: I will pick up on our recommendations. There is an actual deficit when a project ends and the money runs out. One of our criticisms is that we have had countless community relations projects start and finish, leaving a deficit in those communities. There is also an element of potential harm. There has been goodwill, work and effort, and relationships have been built up. When another new project comes along five years down the line, to what extent will you want to get involved? We can sometimes do more harm than good. We really encourage funding to be maintained for that type of work so that it is not lost. The project will change. Schools are committed to continuing the relationships that they have built up, but their hands are tied in what they can facilitate without the funding. Transport is a key issue.

We can use alternative technologies, but they are not a substitute for face-to-face contact. Videoconferencing, for instance, and other forms of e-communication can help to keep contact. There is a connectivity issue for rural communities with those kinds of technologies. As someone who has taught via videoconferencing, it is not an easy or natural process. Shared classes cannot work in that sense. We encourage schools to embrace that as being helpful, but it is not a substitute for face-to-face contact.

Those are some of our legacy issues. There is a will in the partnerships to continue.

Dr McCully: The research indicated that the strongest will lay with the principals who pushed the project, and many teachers were also very committed. Some saw it as another project whose life was over, but there clearly is a will. Many principals talked about money not being the crucial factor. Whether that can be sold to others in the school and to the governors is another matter. I would have thought that resources will have to be deflected from one direction to another to sustain this.

Mr Gilbert: I will pick up on a couple of elements in your question, Mr Newton. We see tangible benefits almost daily in the ongoing relationship between principals in the same areas working together for the benefit of children in that community. We talked about the benefits to teachers in the partnerships that have developed. They do not cost money, and they will continue to be there and to address issues. We emphasised the community aspect: Mr and Mrs Bloggs and Mr and Mrs Jones, who walk down the street in village x and talk to each other, will not stop talking because the money has dried up. We hope that that will be the long legacy.

We sincerely thank you for the opportunity to present today and to demonstrate the potential benefits and, through your good offices and those of others, hopefully to influence policy as we move forward. In many ways, this could almost be described, in an elongated way, as a pilot. We hope that a key part of our developing education system is the use of learning to grow policy into the future. We hope that what emerges from the process will influence the way in which people think about a core aspect of the development of our community in Northern Ireland, which is our young people living and working together. I was struck recently by media pieces on where our young people stand on broader issues in Northern Ireland. For those of us of an older age, a recognition that young people see things through a different pair of glasses is very stark.

Mr Newton: The Chair referred to initiatives of a similar nature. How do you think that PIEE would benchmark against such initiatives in a value-for-money or outcome-based evaluation?

Dr McCully: Given that the project is relatively small scale, addressing areas in schools that are often neglected in such a process, in addition to professional development and inroads into better community relations, I think that the project has achieved a lot. If you are measuring it against projects that have taken cross-community contact as their total focus and have worked in that field, I do not think that you are comparing like with like. It depends where you are starting from. It was a broad-based project about enhancing pupil and professional experience. It was an interesting experiment in bringing that educational experience together holistically, on both the professional development and community relations side.

Mr Rogers: Thank you very much for your submission. I congratulate you on it. I sense the frustration in Dr Hunter's voice. Much has been said today, and the phrase that really strikes home, as someone who was involved in EMU 30 years ago, was made by Mr Gilbert, who said that it was about strong, sustainable partnerships while maintaining the ethos of individual schools. That sort of work ticks so many boxes about building an inclusive society. I do not know whether I even have a question. In my mind, it raises standards because it gives young people educational opportunities. We visited Scotland and looked at STEM subjects in particular. In one school, there was a science expert, and it was able to get that out.

We could build that inclusive society, with children, teachers and parents coming together — perhaps for a Christmas production in a church hall. You made the point very well. It is about bringing our communities along at their own pace, which is so important in Northern Ireland. Different communities move at different paces. My first experience of EMU was when a school near Mervyn's constituency and my school from south Down linked up to do outdoor pursuits in the Mourne. Those things are coming along.

The words "learning" and "strategic" were used, and the Chair made an earlier point about the lack of a strategic approach. In order to move things on, as with initiatives such as Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry, surely there has to be a dissemination of good practice. Rather than it being a two- or three-year project, it should be part of a long-term strategic approach that hopefully fits within shared education. However, your evaluation will be useful only if it begins to move shared education onwards. We cannot reinvent the wheel with another wee project in two or three years' time. Obviously, officials in the North Eastern Education and Library Board are involved in the project at a different stage of development than other boards would be if it were rolled out.

It is not just about a strategic approach from the Department of Education; it has to be a strategic approach from the Executive and from OFMDFM. I really hope that they will take on the learning from the project and begin to roll it out across the Province. I do not have a question. I leave you with my frustrations. As a Committee, perhaps we should write to OFMDFM to ensure that this is a starting point for moving shared education on. I go back to what you said at the start: building a sustainable partnership but maintaining the ethos of our individual schools is fundamental. Thank you again.

Mr Gilbert: Chair, may I make a brief comment? In respect of broader sustainability and learning, I referred briefly and refer again to the resources that were produced. Jayne also referred to the documentation on how to build a sustainable partnership. There are, for example, Internet TV channel resources available. Part of the legacy, we hope, is that, if others are picking up on and learning from that, that will give them the tools to enable them to do it without the project and the funding that capture the real journey. The resources have been built on and very much informed by the experience of those doing it, not someone sitting at a distance from it. Perhaps a couple of principals in another part of the Province might do something, and I recognise and pay due regard and respect to other things that are happening in other boards. We are not in any way trying to say that, somehow or other, we are ahead here. This is simply what we did, and we are sharing it with you. We hope that the resources that are available for all time, in a sense, will have an impact. That was part of our sustainability strategy.

Mr Rogers: I have one more point. The project ticks all the boxes. We talked earlier about area-based planning. We are talking about sustaining rural communities, but we cannot do so if there are no schools in our rural communities. This is all integral to that.

The Chairperson: I am thinking about your point, Sean, on the need for a joined-up approach to shared education, and my frustration is that the Department has set out what it sees as the definition of shared education, provided by or to the ministerial advisory group. The definition states:

"Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion."

I read that in the context of PIEE. However, the project ended. The Department then came out with an announcement on 10 January that the Minister is launching a shared education campus programme. All applications must be in by 31 March, and unless you are looking for capital, you will not get any money.

I think that the Committee should ask the Department to consider funding PIEE urgently. We all know that one of the 10 shared campuses is about to become a train wreck — that is only a personal view — and the others are all sitting at different stages. There is money there that will not all be spent, and here is a project that is delivering and could deliver. Are we able to help to try to get it back on track? If that were the outcome of today's meeting and discussion, it would be a very good day. It would be the first worthwhile day's work that I have done up here for a year or two. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Kinahan: Can we quote you on that? *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: What you did not know was that I am including every one of you in that. It was meant in a collective sense, so do not think that you have done anything better.

Mr Kinahan: I am not saying that I have.

The Chairperson: I think that that is clearly the issue that we need to focus on. That would help to alleviate some of our frustrations.

Danny, you wanted to conclude.

Mr Kinahan: We did not really explore the role of governors. Sometimes when we talk about the future of schools, we talk about federations and working together. In this project, there must have been something similar in getting the governors of both schools to work together. Are we learning from that?

Mr Gilbert: I will let Jayne use the example of the shared teacher to explain how governors work together. That is a good illustrative example of the broader picture.

Miss Millar: In the appointment of a shared teacher, the two schools formulated a subcommittee of governors, with representatives from each school. The subcommittee then took forward the appointment process. Throughout the project, we also developed guidance for governors on the appointment of a shared teacher. We also had resources and guidance on managing a shared teacher. Taking Aideen's point, I think that that can certainly be built on. What it proved is that, when the governors had a particular task and focus, they worked very well together. The key focus for governors is to improve and enhance education for the children in their schools. The governors were very committed to that work and worked together very productively.

Mr Gilbert: I will add to that briefly, referring to a point that I made earlier. Members of small rural communities who get to know each other find out that many of them are — surprise, surprise — governors in their normal day-to-day life, because in small communities, governors make up a much larger proportion of the population. What we have seen, albeit that it is not measurable and tangible in the traditional sense, is how those community-based relationships, working through governors in schools with a different ethos, have had an impact by bringing the community together. That is another benefit that we have seen.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your time and for the work that you have put into the PIEE project. Congratulations to all involved. I think that you can pick up from the tone of today's comments around the table that the Committee is very supportive of trying to see how we can use this. We will forward all the information to the Department and ask it to comment. We will specifically ask it

how we can secure funding in the shared education structure to enable the project to be re-established. In the meantime, thank you very much. Following on from Sean's point, I think that we should also write to OFMDFM.