

27 April 2016

Suzanne Kingon
Integrated Review
Room F10
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

Dear Ms Kingon

Re: Review of Integrated Education

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to inform the Panel's work to deliver a Review of Integrated Education.

We set out below a range of overarching points, and supporting evidence, which we hope will be of value in framing and informing the Review Panel's considerations. To assist, we have sought to align our comments to the major themes being considered by the Panel.

[Views on Integrated Education](#)

- 1.1 The Equality Commission considers that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation, including in education provision.
- 1.2 **It is the Commission's view that an education system, where sharing impacts meaningfully and substantively on every learner, has a key role to play in advancing a shared society.**
- 1.3 The history of education in Northern Ireland has been, to varying degrees, one of separate provision for boys and girls, disabled and non-disabled, Traveller and settled, and children of differing faith backgrounds. An added separation occurs at age 11, when children are further differentiated through the current academic selection process, with outcomes influenced by socio-economic status.
- 1.4 Sharing in education also needs to be considered in the context of wider sharing. Shared services, shared housing and shared spaces have the potential to enhance and be enhanced by sharing and integration within the education system.

- 1.5 Research has identified educational, economic and societal benefits of sharing in education. The latter is of particular relevance to Integrated education. For example, research examining the effects of integrated and segregated schooling on Northern Irish children found *‘that those attending separate schools were likely to hold more prejudiced attitudes towards the ‘out’ group than their peers attending integrated schools’*¹. The study also found that the mere fact that pupils are given an opportunity to engage with each other on a sustained basis is a key variable in the generation of more positive inter-group attitudes.² However, the same study also reported that *‘some research on integrated schools has suggested that teachers in such schools avoid reference to controversial issues or encounter difficulty in dealing with issues of division’*. The Review Panel may wish to give consideration to these, or similar, issues.

Nature of Integrated Education

- 1.6 **The Equality Commission recommends a move to a system of education which routinely teaches pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classes.**
- 1.7 While it is neither the Commission’s intent nor remit to advocate a specific model or models of education, we consider that any system must:
- Ensure that sharing **impacts meaningfully and substantively on every learner**
 - Ensure that a shared experience should be **central to the education system as a whole,**
 - Encompass **all stages of educational provision** – pre-school; early years; primary; post-primary; special needs; and tertiary levels.
 - Routinely teach learners together via **a shared curriculum in shared classes.**
 - Better provide learners with **shared awareness,** understanding and experience of the **value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds** in Northern Ireland; while also enabling learners from different cultures/communities to **experience a shared society.**
- 1.8 This is not to undermine the rights of parents to make choices regarding their child’s attendance at specific *schools*, or for the provision of faith-based schools. However, such considerations cannot overshadow the importance of a *system* of education as a whole seeking to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations.
- 1.9 **The Commission also considers that sharing in education, across the full range of equality grounds has the potential to improve educational access and attainment for pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities.** This includes the need for a particular focus

¹ Hughes and Donnelly (2012): *Chapter 4 Promoting Good Relations – the role of schools in Northern Ireland*, page 59

² Ibid, page 60

on the steps required to facilitate improved educational attainment for those groups identified as being at particular disadvantage.

1.10 The Commission's 2010 publication "*Inequalities in Education: Facts and Trends 1998-2008*"³ sought to consider patterns of educational attainment in Northern Ireland by different equality groups – noting differential patterns by, for example⁴, community background; gender; disability and for Irish Travellers.

1.11 The Commission's recent draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Education⁵ further considered patterns of educational attainment in Northern Ireland by different equality groups, noting differential patterns by community background, gender, disability and for Travellers and Roma pupils.

1.12 Key findings, in relation to attainment, included:

- In respect to gender, males have lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A level. This inequality results in fewer male school leavers entering higher education than females.
- Children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups.
- Minority ethnic school leavers are more likely to leave school with no GCSEs and enter unemployment than white school leavers.
- Students with SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education.
- Protestants have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A level. This inequality results in fewer Protestant school leavers entering higher education than Catholics.
- There is persistent underachievement and lack of progression of working class Protestants, particularly males.

1.13 **The Commission remains of the view that the overall system of education provision in Northern Ireland has an important role to play, not only in the development of the child, but in advancing**

³ ECNI (2010): *Inequalities in Education – Facts and Trends 1998-2008*. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/InequalitiesinEducationfactsandtrends1998-2008.pdf>

⁴ Factors such as being in receipt of 'free school meals', or having been 'in the care of the state' are also correlated with poorer educational attainment and outcomes.

⁵ ECNI (2016) [Draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Education](#)

cohesion, sharing and integration across all equality grounds. This is not solely a job for schools, but schools do play a critical role⁶.

- 1.14 We consider that the core focus of sharing in education should be on ensuring meaningful and sustained sharing between learners of different community backgrounds; while also incentivising sharing across all equality grounds, including to address the socio-economic issues which are experienced by a number of equality groups.
- 1.15 Clear outcome goals should be established to direct and measure progress towards meaningful and substantive sharing.

Government Support for Integrated Education

- 1.16 The Commission notes the progress made in relation to shared education through the Shared Education Policy and is aware that legislation is currently awaiting Royal Assent.
- 1.17 We note however, the disparity which the new legislation will create in relation to the Department of Education's duties - in that its duty to 'promote' shared education extends beyond its duties in relation to Integrated Education.
- 1.18 In our engagement on the Shared Education Bill, we recommended that any duties for the Department should mirror those in relation to Integrated education - supplementing but not replacing the existing Article 64⁷ obligation on Integrated education. **In this context, we recommend that the Review Panel advocates for comparable duties on the Department across both Shared and Integrated Education.**
- 1.19 As noted elsewhere in this response, we consider that while the core focus of sharing in education should be on sharing between learners of different community backgrounds; we note the potential for incentivising sharing across all equality grounds, including to address the socio-economic issues which are experienced by a number of equality groups.
- 1.20 On a related point, we are aware that public discourse regarding the potential to further advance equality of opportunity and good relations in schools has set out a range of potential approaches - whether it be a discrete statutory obligation on schools; designation under Section 75; a policy directive from the Department; or mainstreaming through the curriculum. However, the Commission has not to date supported the designation of schools under Section 75.

⁶ The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts (2010), page 11. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCountsApr2010.pdf>

⁷ Article 64(1) of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 ("the 1989 Order") provides a duty on the Department of Education to "encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education, that is to say the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils".

Planning for Sharing in Education

- 1.21 **Research indicates that there are clear opportunities to learn lessons from experiences of Integrated and shared education to date; and to enhance existing mechanisms.**
- 1.22 Opportunities include cross-sectoral area learning communities; guidance and leadership to maximise high quality and sustained teacher and pupil contact; maximising the alignment of the curriculum and the CRED policy to promote good relations; developing area based planning and funding mechanisms to better incentivise cross-sectoral / ability sharing; and developing targeted indicators and evaluation processes.
- 1.23 In 2010 the Commission jointly published a challenge paper entitled *“Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts - A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st Century”*⁸ which included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education. In 2012⁹ and again in 2014¹⁰ we highlighted the opportunities to build upon and extend existing education policy and practice– including:
- How **Area Learning Partnerships** / Communities might effectively encourage sharing between providers from different sectors / management types – including those not already involved in community relations work.
 - How **area based planning** and **funding mechanisms** could better be used to facilitate and incentivise increased sharing on cross-sectoral and ability lines, including via the common funding formula.
 - The importance of **key school level enablers** including high-quality contact; school leadership; links between teachers; a focus on the curriculum and the sharing of resources between teachers.
 - The importance of **guidance** for schools who wish to embark on sharing and for those who wish to move toward greater interdependency.
 - The importance of **indicators and evaluation** to measure and review sharing and collaboration in education provision and governance – both to acknowledge success and promote improvement.
 - The importance of **data collection, across all Section 75 grounds** and FSM eligibility, for all educational projects, including key Delivering Social Change projects.

⁸ The Good Relations Forum (2010): Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts – A Strategy to meet our needs for the 21st century. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/EnsuringGoodRelationsWorkinourSchoolsCountsApr2010.pdf>

⁹ ECNI (2012), [Submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education. November 2012](#)

¹⁰ ECNI (2104) Written Evidence to NI Assembly Education Committee ‘Inquiry into Shared Education and Integrated Education’, October 2014

- 1.24 In 2012¹¹, we noted that while all publicly funded schools were technically open to pupils from any background, the general pattern of school enrolment is not one of diversity and while integrated schools *‘represent a highly significant and distinctive approach to Integrated education....only the minority of the school population attend them’*. We noted that *“Understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, differential patterns of enrolment to education providers may therefore in itself suggest factors of relevance in the development of a more shared system of education in Northern Ireland.”*
- 1.25 We reiterate again our recommendation that the Department of Education utilise lessons drawn from the research¹² regarding sharing in education – including, for example, that relating to Integrated Education Model and the QUB Shared Education Programme¹³.
- 1.26 **Research also indicates that there is a need to engage with pupils, parents, education providers and wider stakeholders.** Such engagement should seek to communicate the rationale for any proposed system; to learn from experiences to date; to inform and improve associated policy frameworks / implementation plans; and to incentivise any moves.
- 1.27 We note that an evaluation¹⁴ of the Sharing in Education Programme highlighted that when projects involved parents/carers, they lead to a more enriched experience for participants. Gallagher and Duffy (2012) have also noted the importance of parental support and involvement in their analysis¹⁵ of the Shared Education Programme (SEP):

“Some of the schools talked about cross-sector collaboration needing parental support and involvement. Those schools situated in contested space appeared to experience the most resistance from parents; perhaps due to concerns about safety moving through contested space or their children mixing with young people from the other side of the community. According to some Coordinators, parents were also dealing with the legacy of the conflict themselves.”

¹¹ see footnote 9 above

¹² Our 2012 Submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education summarises a range of research regarding integrated education and the QUB Shared Education Programme.

¹³ The SEP encourages schools to make cross-sectoral collaborations an integral part of school life, creating enhanced educational and personal development opportunities for everyone involved. The SEP has, since 2007, involved over 100 schools at Post-Primary and Primary level in cross-sectoral collaboration concentrating on substantive, curriculum based activities. In the year beginning Sep 2010, SEP2 partnerships involved over 4,000 students across Northern Ireland. See <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/>

¹⁴ ETI (2013): A final evaluation of the International Fund for Ireland's Sharing in Education Programme. Available at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/international-fund-for-irelands-sharing-in-education-programme/a-final-evaluation-of-the-international-fund-for-irelands-sharing-in-education-programme.htm>

¹⁵ Duffy, G., Gallagher, T., (2012) Sustaining Cross-Sector Collaboration: An examination of schools involved in the first cohort of the Sharing Education Programme - <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/documents/Sustainability%20Report.pdf>

- 1.28 We also recommend, in line with our consistent call for effective engagement with Section 75 groups, that the Department and other key bodies also take steps to ensure effective engagement with children and young people in the design, delivery, implementation and review of shared education initiatives.
- 1.29 **We also highlight the importance of establishing clear measures and goals, linking actions, outputs, outcomes and impacts,** and ensuring that such measures move beyond simply describing policy outputs to measure the outcomes and impacts that we would expect to see in society, for example - shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland.
- 1.30 Finally, we wish to highlight that action is needed in a number of related areas to address wider issues of integration in education – we reiterate our concern about academic selection at age 11; our recommendations for the removal of the teacher’s exception under FETO at secondary level; and of the need for greater sharing and collaboration in teacher training.

We trust that this response is of use, and are happy to discuss it further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Howe
Senior Policy Officer

Direct line 02890 500599
Email dhowe@equalityni.org