



KEY POINT BRIEFING

Equality in Education: Policy Recommendations

There is a pressing need to secure change in relation to **tackling prejudice-based bullying**; and **addressing inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children**. We also call for prompt action to **advance childcare and early years provision**; to **drive attainment via collaborative approaches** involving family and the wider community; and to put in place a **system for learning from successful interventions**.

More broadly, we also recommend that government, officials and key stakeholders take action in the following areas:

IMPROVE EQUALITY DATA AND ANALYSIS

Establish robust, reliable education information systems to address existing equality data gaps and provide more disaggregated data. Address current gaps including on grounds of gender identity, religious belief / political opinion, belonging to a minority ethnic group, disability, sexual orientation and people with dependants.

ADVANCE A SHARED SOCIETY THROUGH EDUCATION

Move to a system of education which routinely teaches all pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classes, in support of better advancing a shared society. Sharing across the education system could 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.

TACKLE PREJUDICE-BASED BULLYING AND CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES

Including against identified groups such as trans pupils; minority ethnic students; those with same sex attraction; and those with SEN / disabilities; and challenge gender stereotypes. We welcome the 2016 Addressing Bullying in Schools Act. The Department of Education and Education Authority should ensure its guidance on complying with the legislation is comprehensively implemented and updated as required. Research should be undertaken to establish, and track over time, the prevalence and nature of prejudice-based bullying, and assess compliance with the legislation. We call for action to ensure that one off and unintentional acts of prejudice-based bullying are adequately dealt with in guidance. Strong and visible leadership is needed from the school Principal, senior management team and governors, to promote an anti-bullying culture. Support materials and opportunities within the curriculum should address prejudice-based bullying, particularly around gender identity, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Gender roles should be challenged, and legislative protection extended to disability-based harassment in schools.

ADDRESS INEQUALITIES IN ATTAINMENT AND ACCESS

Including those experienced by Irish Travellers, Roma and Newcomer children; those entitled to free school meals, particularly boys, notably Protestant boys; looked after children, young carers; and disabled children and young people.

Of benefit to all children: we call for delivery of a shared curriculum in shared classes to support improved attainment; the provision and monitoring of appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare and early years. Collaborative approaches to drive attainment, involving parents, families, carers and the wider community should be promoted. The Education Authority should put in place a system for learning from successful interventions. The Department of Education should develop a system of post primary transfer that enables all pupils to maximise their potential.

Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children: Budget allocations for specific groups should be monitored to assess how they improve outcomes for pupils. The Department of Education should put in place measures to support the education of Traveller and Roma children, particularly in relation to: data collection and analysis; admissions and registration processes; planning transitions; and examining segregated provision. More transparent monitoring of the Traveller Child in Education Action Framework is needed. The Department of Education should assist schools in making use of dual language resources to help Newcomer learners access the curriculum, identify and address the complex emotional, educational and social needs of asylum seeking and refugee children, and ensure adequate funding is available to meet the needs of those who arrive during the year.

Children with SEN and disabilities: Government should ensure the quality of educational experiences received by children with SEN in Northern Ireland. We call for the proposed code of practice to support the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act NI (2016) to clarify outstanding issues, including around student involvement and staff training; and for relevant legislation to be amended to address deficiencies.

Young carers and looked after children: the Departments of Health and Education should provide tailored support to ensure the effective participation in education of every looked after child; and, work in collaboration to identify young carers and provide services to support them and improve their educational outcomes.

MAINSTREAM EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Including in the curriculum, teacher training and the policies / practices of schools and wider education bodies. Comprehensive action should be taken by the Department of Education, schools and other education bodies to embed equality and good relations within the content and delivery of the curriculum. Equality and good relations issues should be mainstreamed into initial teacher education and continuing professional development, as part of the teacher professional learning framework and there should be greater sharing and collaboration between teacher training colleges.

For further information: www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy

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