



EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Key Point Briefing: Policy Position on Sharing in Education

March 2015

Societal mixing and cohesion is limited by Separation in education.

The Equality Commission considers that societal mixing and social cohesion is limited by separation, including in education provision. 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.

The Equality Commission recommends a move to a system of education which routinely teaches pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classes.

Sharing must impact meaningfully and substantively on every learner and be central to the education system as a whole. The Commission recommends a move towards a system of sharing across the full spectrum of education providers which teaches a diverse range of pupils together.

The Department should have a duty to encourage and facilitate sharing, centred on community background but incentivising wider sharing.

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. Clear outcome goals should be established to direct and measure progress towards meaningful and substantive sharing,

Action is needed to address wider issues in education – academic selection; teacher training and employment; and patterns of enrolment.

The Commission continues to highlight the importance of addressing wider issues linked to sharing in education. We reiterate our concern about

academic selection at age 11; and our recommendations for the removal of the teacher's exception under FETO at secondary level; for greater sharing and collaboration in teacher training; and for actions to better understanding the reasons for, and impacts of, any differential patterns of enrolment to education providers.

Sharing in Education has the potential to advance Equality of Opportunity.

The Commission 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.

Sharing in Education has an important role to play in Advancing Good Relations.

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 cohesion, sharing and integration across all equality grounds.

Research has identified educational, economic and societal benefits of sharing in education.

Sharing can facilitate pupils to access the full curriculum and a wider range of educational, sporting and cultural experiences; offer opportunities to improve standards and outcomes for all learners; maximise sustainability and reduce costs; and foster good relations by providing an environment for longer term-sustained contact for both teachers and learners.

There are clear opportunities to learn lessons from experiences of Integrated and shared education to date; and to enhance existing mechanisms.

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.

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.