



EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Summary: 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.

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 In the Commission's (November 2008) publication "Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention"¹ the Commission noted that it was:

'difficult to avoid the conclusion that the long experience of separate educational provision has represented a lost opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland.'
- 1.3 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.

¹ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75%20P10%20investigation%20reports/Keyinequalitiesineducation2008.pdf>

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.

- 1.4 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.**
- 1.5 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.

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,

- 1.6 We consider that the allocation of responsibility for mainstreaming sharing needs to be explicit. We recommend that once ‘Shared Education’ is appropriately defined, a duty to ‘*encourage and facilitate*’ shared education should be placed on the Department of Education, supplementing but not replacing the existing Article 64² obligation on integrated education.
- 1.7 We also recommend that any definition providing for a continuum ensures that sharing is central to the system of education as a whole and that it impacts meaningfully and substantively on every learner.
- 1.8 We 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.
- 1.9 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. The Commission has not to date supported the designation of schools under Section 75.

² 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”.

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.

1.10 In 2008³ the Commission affirmed:

- continued concern about the system of academic selection at eleven years old;
- that all teachers should be able to enjoy the same legislative protection as other workers and the exemption in FETO should be abolished at secondary level, as previously recommended, with early consideration given to urging the removal of the exemption at all levels; and
- the provision of shared education should be encouraged.

1.11 In 2012⁴ 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’*⁵. 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.”*

1.12 We remain⁶ concerned about the impact that the separate provision of teacher training has on job opportunities, professional development and the promotion of good relations; and considered

³ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75%20P10%20investigation%20reports/Keyinequalitiesineducation2008.pdf>

⁴ ECNI (2012), Submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education. November 2012

⁵ Bain (2006): Schools for the future – funding strategy and sharing, para.13.11, page 179. Available at http://www.deni.gov.uk/review_of_education.pdf

⁶ ECNI (2013) Response to the ‘Review of the Initial Teacher Education infrastructure in Northern Ireland’ http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Consultation%20Responses/2013/DEL_ReviewITE2013_Final_201213.pdf

that closer collaboration between all initial teacher training providers in Northern Ireland would have a range of benefits, including in relation to good relations.

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.

- 1.13 The Commission considers that sharing in education not only has the potential to provide meaningful and sustainable relations between pupils of different cultures and backgrounds, but also to advance equality of opportunity. This includes the need for a particular focus on the steps required to facilitate improved educational attainment for those groups identified as being at particular disadvantage.
- 1.14 The Commission's 2007 'Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland'⁷ and subsequent (2008) publication '*Every Child an Equal Child: An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention*'⁸, set out a range of key educational inequalities in Northern Ireland and strategies to address same.
- 1.15 The Commission's subsequent 2010 publication "*Inequalities in Education: Facts and Trends 1998-2008*"⁹ sought to consider patterns of educational attainment in Northern Ireland by different equality groups – noting differential patterns by, for example¹⁰, community background; gender; disability and for Irish Travellers.
- Those with / without a declared disability: There are still considerable differences in the highest educational attainment and in participation in Education between those with and without a declared disability.

⁷ [http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Keyinequalities\(F\)1107.pdf](http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Keyinequalities(F)1107.pdf)

⁸ ECNI (2008): *Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention*, pages 5 and 6. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75%20P10%20investigation%20reports/Keyinequalitiesineducation2008.pdf>

⁹ ECNI (2010): *Inequalities in Education – Facts and Trends 1998-2008*. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/InequalitiesinEducationfactsand trends1998-2008.pdf>

¹⁰ 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.

- Irish Travellers: There remains a noticeable gap between the highest education attainment and destinations of Irish Traveller and non-Traveller school leavers
- Gender: While there has been considerable improvement in the highest level of educational attainment of both male and female school leavers, this improvement has been markedly more evident for females than for males.
- Community background: Amongst school leavers, there has been considerable improvement in the highest level of educational attainment of both communities, although the gap between highest educational attainment of Protestant and Roman Catholic school leavers has widened.

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.

- 1.16 In November 2008, in ‘Every Child an Equal Child’ the Commission noted:

‘It is hard to escape the conclusion that educating children of different backgrounds together has the potential to reduce the fears and tensions between communities that are founded on ignorance.’

- 1.17 We have also made it clear that we are committed to using our full range of powers across equality and anti-discrimination statutes ‘to ensure that all children and young people in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to flourish and succeed to the best of their abilities’.¹¹
- 1.18 The Commission recognises the important role that education can play in cultural development - providing exposure to literature, language, sport, activities, art, music etc.

¹¹ ECNI (2008): Every Child an Equal Child – An Equality Commission Statement on Key Inequalities in Education and a Strategy for Intervention. Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75%20P10%20investigation%20reports/Keyinequalitiesineducation2008.pdf>

- 1.19 The Commission also recognises the crucial role that schools have in contributing to the reconciliation of our society. This is not solely a job for schools, but schools do play a critical role¹².

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.

- 1.20 In 2012¹³ we summarised that arguments in favour of sharing in education are broadly-based and generally rest on three inter-related factors: the educational case; the economic case; and the societal case.
- 1.21 Educational Case: Sharing can allow pupils to access the full range of the curriculum and may be encouraged to study those wider subjects at a further or higher education college. Such access is seen as *‘vital in areas where deprivation is more prevalent and is an important driver in breaking the cycle’*¹⁴. Pairing more effective schools with less effective schools may also offer the potential to close achievement gaps by improving standards and outcomes for all learners¹⁵. Cross-sectoral sharing of facilities and teaching can also act as a means of ensuring that all young people have access to a wider range of sporting and cultural resources as well as community based activities.
- 1.22 Economic Case: In 2006, the Bain Review¹⁶ highlighted the surplus of school places across all sectors and argued strongly for sharing resources to ensure that the schools estate was affordable and used efficiently. Sharing has the potential to reduce the number of separate schools estates across Northern Ireland and to focus on actual demographic patterns - *‘Sustainability issues may be*

¹² 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>

¹³ ECNI (2012), Submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education. November 2012

¹⁴ Oxford Economic (2010): *Developing the case for Shared Education*, page 12. Available at <http://www.ief.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Economic-case.pdf>

¹⁵ Borooah and Knox (2012): Delivering Shared Education: Knowledge Exchange seminar

¹⁶ Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools DE 2006

*addressed through increased co-operation and working with other schools particularly where the main issue affecting a small school is declining enrolment numbers.*¹⁷ There is the potential for sharing to contribute to the wider goal of lowering the costs of a divided society, ‘both directly and indirectly in the future (for example the direct costs arising from civil unrest or the provision of separate services).

- 1.23 **Societal Case:** 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’ group¹⁸ than their peers attending integrated schools¹⁹*. 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.²⁰ A shared approach to education can also result in the provision of education which is more suited to the needs of local communities and address any gaps in educational delivery.

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.

- 1.24 The Commission considers that a shared system of education is aligned to the delivery of a range of government strategies and programmes (Programme for Government; Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; Every School a Good School etc) and maximising efficiencies in the school system and estate.
- 1.25 Mainstreaming sharing also fits within a number of the Department of Education’s priorities – including a commitment to improving education performance at GCSE level, particularly for those from a disadvantaged background. The Department’s Community

¹⁷ Ibid, page 13

¹⁸ The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group (‘us’) will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group (‘them’), thus enhancing their self-image.

¹⁹ Hughes and Donnelly (2012): *Chapter 4 Promoting Good Relations – the role of schools in Northern Ireland*, page 59

²⁰ Ibid, page 60

Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy²¹ seeks to “develop learners who understand and respect the rights, equality and diversity (including linguistic diversity) of all S75 groups”.

1.26 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”²² which included a number of recommendations to progress sharing and good relations in education. In 2012²³ and again in 2014²⁴ 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.

1.27 We also highlighted the opportunity to better overcome known barriers, recommending that the Department of Education utilise

²¹ Department of Education (2011): *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education*, page 25. Available at <http://soap.tibus.com/credni/filestore/documents/Final%20CRED%20Policy%20-%20March%202011%20-%20English%20PDF.PDF>

²² 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>

²³ ECNI (2012), [Submission to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education. November 2012](#)

²⁴ ECNI (2104) Written Evidence to NI Assembly Education Committee ‘Inquiry into Shared Education and Integrated Education’, October 2014

lessons drawn from the research²⁵ regarding sharing in education – including, for example, that relating to Integrated Education Model and the QUB Shared Education Programme²⁶.

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.

- 1.28 We note that an evaluation²⁷ 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 analysis²⁸ 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.”

- 1.29 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 & young people (C&YP) in the design, delivery, implementation and review of shared education initiatives.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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/>

²⁷ 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>

²⁸ 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>