

Integrated Education Fund

Submission to the Independent Review of Education



2022

"It's about inclusivity; it's sharing your differences regardless of your background and you can come together and share your opinion.

It's about being in a class with people of different opinions, and we respect pupils as individuals, and we are able to talk to teachers about our opinions."

Sophia (pupil at Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle)

Introduction

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) shares the vision, held by many people in Northern Ireland, of a united community and a shared future where, increasingly, children from different traditions learn and play together at school, helping to build a society where there is respect and celebration, not fear, of religious and cultural diversity.

Many believe that more integration and mixing between communities are essential to building a better and more reconciled society.

71% of people believe integrated schools should be the norm for our education system.¹ In these schools, children from Protestant, Catholic, other faith backgrounds and none, are educated together in the same classrooms, every day. In these schools, the symbols, ethos and traditions of the entire community are valued and respected.

Our vision for the future is for a reformed, united education system which is more equitable, less sectoral, less bureaucratic and which makes better use of resources.

The different bodies administering education need to be merged and rationalised into one body which supports the overall needs of the education community rather than individual sectoral and religious interests. Such a body would also recognise and respect diversity and ensure that all young people regardless of ability, sexual orientation and gender including those with additional needs and LGBTQ+ pupils, feel confident and welcome in their school.

A reformed, united education system would prepare and equip young people to contribute to an increasingly complex global society.

There is increasing demand for Integrated Education and more integrated schools as can be illustrated by successive public opinion polls and school parental ballots supporting the growth of Integrated Education. A more integrated system will not solve all Northern Ireland's problems, but it will help to break down the division which has been perpetuated by the current segregated system.

“We have a segregated education system, along with segregated housing and segregated communities. The consequence of that segregation is an inefficient system, with various bodies and structures supporting the different sectors.”

Ms Koulla Yiasouma, NI Commissioner for Children and Young People

Context

Our Flawed Education System

It is undoubtedly true that there are many very good schools and many dedicated and professional teachers across Northern Ireland, as well as many other staff and school Governors who work tirelessly to support schools, both non-integrated and integrated.

However, the education system within which those dedicated staff work is, through no fault of theirs, seriously flawed. It has been criticised for providing an inadequately skilled workforce and for being one of the most unequal education systems in the world.

The resulting skills shortages and the failings of the current system are evidenced in a variety of sources, including:

- The lowest proportion of working adults with a degree.
and
The lowest rate of adult literacy in the United Kingdom.²

- 16.6% of 16 to 64 year olds with no qualifications, compared to 8% of all UK residents. ³
- A much lower rate of enrolment into Higher Education than other parts of the UK and many other countries. ⁴
- A skills shortage and, most likely not unconnected, some of the poorest economic conditions and lowest growth rates in the UK. ⁵

CBI Northern Ireland says *“Our education system requires significant and urgent change. It is incumbent on our Education Minister that Integrated Education plays a significant part in that change.”* ⁶

Independent research indicates that children and young people who attend integrated schools are more likely to have positive social attitudes to, and have more friendships with, pupils from a different background to their own. Research suggests that extended contact between children and young people from different community backgrounds creates the conditions for generating mutual respect and understanding.

A segregated education system

90% of pupils in Northern Ireland are educated in schools that identify with a single tradition or denomination. Only 7.2% of Catholics attend Controlled schools and 1.1% of Protestants attend Catholic Maintained schools. ⁷

A Sky News Poll of a nationally representative sample of Sky customers in Northern Ireland, in March 2018, showed that 69% of people believe that every school in Northern Ireland should be integrated. ⁸

A further Sky News Poll, in April 2019, found that 51% of people in Northern Ireland have few or no friends of a different religion and, among 18 to 34 year olds, that figure rose to 58%. ⁹

“Whilst Shared Education has been an important step towards increased mixing within the school environment, the findings in this report (‘It Didn’t End in 1998’) support more fundamental changes to the structuring of the community in Northern Ireland.

Increasing the provision (and funding) of integrated education, particularly given the increasing demand and oversubscription, is key and thus attention should be given to the UNCRC Concluding Observations in 2016 that a ‘fully integrated education system’ is actively promoted”.

Commission for Victims and Survivors ¹⁰

Education has an important role to play in reconciliation; the way it is delivered should never get in the way of people from different backgrounds being educated together and getting to know and understand each other.

An inefficient education system

There are close to 50,000 empty desks in schools across Northern Ireland and upwards of £95 million per annum is wasted on duplication. ¹⁰

It is estimated that over £1 billion has been spent in the last decade on bringing our young people together in various cross-community initiatives to correct the negative consequences and prejudices resulting from their experience of segregation at school. ¹¹ Whilst Shared Education helps bring young people and schools together through increased contact, it is only Integrated Education that allows young people from different backgrounds to be together in the same classrooms, learning side by side, every day. ¹²

A further cost to the public purse is school transport, which costs approximately £81 million per year and sees children being bussed past their nearest school to attend a school of a different type. ¹³ This staggering cost further illustrates the need to urgently revisit the economic impact of a segregated education system.

Growing demand for integrated schools

The Northern Ireland Attitudinal Poll by LucidTalk in July 2021 showed 71% of Northern Ireland people questioned in this survey believed that Integrated Education should be the main model of education. 73% said if their child's local school were to consider becoming an integrated school, they would support this.¹⁴

Thanks to the actions of parents right across Northern Ireland, there are 68 integrated schools with over 25,000 pupils. This includes four schools which transformed to become integrated in September 2021, through the democratic actions of their parent communities. One more school has just been approved to become integrated in September 2022, with an additional school currently awaiting approval from the Department of Education to transform to integrated status. In addition, there have recently been parental ballots in two schools in support of transformation, and over 30 other schools expressing an interest in exploring the process of transformation further.

"It's not just about bringing Catholics and Protestants together; Integrated Education is far more than that.

It is the bringing together and the teaching of people from all abilities, all religions, all sexualities, all genders, all interests and personalities. It prepares young people for their way forward no matter where they go in the world"

Tara, past pupil of New-Bridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland

The need to reform the education system

The societal, economic and educational impact of Northern Ireland's current segregated system is far-ranging including, for example, the impact on business and on the environment.

"I didn't apply (to university) at home because I wanted to live somewhere less focused on religion and politics"

Respondent to "Should I stay, or should I go? Reasons for leaving Northern Ireland for study or work" Pivotal Public Policy Forum NI ¹⁵

Impact on Business

Research carried out by Pivotal ¹⁶, a future facing public policy forum, found that the number one reason that young people right across the educational sphere leave Northern Ireland to study or work is poor community relations, with 88% of participants having no plans to return to Northern Ireland after graduation.

Business leaders and economists question and criticise the costly duplication in our current education system. The findings from the Northern Ireland Business Leaders Survey indicated majority support for a reformed education system, to help strengthen cross-community relationships and enable funds to be directed towards developing skills.

Indeed, Paul Murnaghan, President of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce identified the provision of Integrated Education as key to young people in Northern Ireland benefiting from a high-quality education. ¹⁷

Impact on the Environment

The division and duplication of education provision contribute to education's carbon footprint, and have a significant negative impact on the environment.

The Ulster University estimates in the region of 84,000 pupils are currently eligible for transport assistance which is around 26% of the school population. This cost of home to school transport provision is approximately £81 million per year.¹⁸

This additional travel each year is accommodating school choice, academically selective schooling and community segregation. The figure is comparable to that calculated in 2014, in research which stated that there are approximately 144 million miles a year travelled to and from Northern Ireland's schools.¹⁹

There is an urgent need to review the education system and have a single education body to oversee all aspects of education including area planning in Northern Ireland. Appointments to the new body should be to meet the needs of children and young people under the guidance of education professionals with elected representatives not included on the board of this new body.

It would be envisaged that this new body would absorb the current separate publicly funded organisations into one single department that could oversee the planning and management of school provision as well as address separate sectoral issues.

The Department of Education must work with all other departments including Justice, Communities, Health, Economy and Finance to address reconciliation and the commitments of the Good Friday Agreement i.e. to support the development of Integrated Education and Shared Housing.

This joined-up approach would enable the Northern Ireland Executive to set and meet annual targets. This would lead to a more integrated system for Integrated Education and Shared Housing.

Area Planning

Currently there are two separate statutory area planning authorities for schools: the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), which oversees planning for all Catholic Maintained Schools; and the Education Authority (EA), which oversees planning for all other school types. The resulting disjointed approach has led to years of poor area planning and goes some way to explain why Northern Ireland now faces over-provision.

This approach to planning has, in many areas, led to duplication of provision, often with each school being, on its own, unsustainable. For example, there are 32 instances of pairs of schools across Northern Ireland offering primary-aged education to two different communities but only yards apart.²⁰ At present, the closure of a school means that the existing pupils are bussed to the nearest school of that type, resulting in consolidation of school types, rather than using the closure as an opportunity to work with parents to establish schools, such as integrated schools, which can meet the needs of whole communities.

This approach could avoid closures and help to stabilise rural communities.

To support this, there needs to be a single, streamlined, authority for education planning to prevent the undue influence of individual sectors and vested interests.

Planning for Northern Ireland's education and the schools' estate must reflect community needs and we would suggest using the established Community Conversations model to enable parental preference planning. This would help to achieve the common aspiration for a peaceful, diverse and united community.

The IEF believes that establishing evidence based parental demand is crucial to planning for all school provision to ensure the schools' estate meets the needs of the community. This approach would support Northern Ireland to move away from the current segregated education system.

Boards of Governors

Northern Ireland schools are managed by partnerships between principals and boards of voluntary governors. The role of the Governor is complex and challenging; there needs to be careful selection and training to ensure that school governors are equipped with the necessary skills.

The size and composition of boards is determined by a complex set of formulae that ensure the boards are made up of representatives of specific stakeholder groups. Indeed, there are many different types of Boards of Governors across schools in Northern Ireland.

Within this range of boards there is a lack of diversity and a paucity of board members who bring particular skills and insights to the work. Some concerning

examples include the instances where the Chairperson of a Board of Governors must always be a church appointee, as well as where there is no limit to the number of years an individual can be a governor for.

There needs to be a single model of governance, which is reflective of wider society and draws upon the voices of young people and parents as well as professional bodies and community groups to meet skills requirements.

Teacher Employment Legislation

Schools in Northern Ireland can, quite legally, discriminate for appointments or promotions of teachers on grounds of religion.

Schools do not have to monitor the community background of their teaching staff, something which is required of all other employers and organisations in Northern Ireland with more than ten employees.

The exception from the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO) has been shown to have an impact on teacher mobility across school sectors, which contributes to the reduction of diversity of teaching staff in most schools.

The FETO exception needs to be repealed to help create fair and equitable employment for teachers.

Teacher Education structures

Northern Ireland has four Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers. Many of those teachers, through this system, will have attended schools which primarily represent their community background and will have gone straight into Initial Teacher Education, which is also likely to be selected according to their community background, to complete an undergraduate degree which awards Qualified Teacher Status, and they then most likely will return to work in the sector in which they went to school.²¹

There needs to be one unified teacher training system, where Catholic, Protestant and those of other faiths and none are trained together on a daily basis, in the same classrooms.

Key Changes – what needs to change?

A long-term plan is needed with a road map over the next 20 years to normalise the education system; with set targets to measure progress and allow young people from different backgrounds to be educated together in the same classrooms, learning side by side, every day.

1. A single body for the administration of education (please see Appendix 1).
2. Area based planning which is shaped by the community and reflects parental choice and community needs.
3. A single model of governance for all schools.
4. A single teacher training system, where teachers of all faiths and none are trained together.
5. The extension of fair employment legislation to the recruitment of teachers i.e. the removal of the FETO exception.
6. A Department of Education Integrated Education Strategy to encourage, facilitate, promote and support the growth and development of integrated schools.
7. Cross-departmental working to ensure best use of resources and to help increase Shared Housing and Integrated Education.
8. Ring fenced funding to support schools in their progress towards Integrated Education.
9. A presumption established in overarching area-based planning that all new schools should be integrated.
10. Ring fenced funding by the Department of Education and resources for a dedicated team within the Department of Education to match the growing needs of Integrated Education.

The Integrated Education Fund

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) has been working since 1992 towards a Northern Ireland where children from different traditions learn and play together in the same classrooms, in the same schools, and where there is a respect and celebration of religious and cultural diversity. The IEF is an independent charity dedicated to the development and growth of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. Over the last 30 years the IEF has invested over £26 million in new and transformed integrated schools.

The IEF's vision for the future of Northern Ireland was outlined in the Introduction to this paper. However, it is worth emphasising here that, as an independent charity, independent of the influence of the key stakeholders in Northern Ireland today, the IEF is in a position to share the vision, held by many people in Northern Ireland, of a united community and a shared future, where, increasingly, children from different traditions learn and play together at school.

Government Bodies

Currently there are many Government bodies being funded to oversee education in Northern Ireland including:

- Department of Education
- Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)
- Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- General Teaching Council for NI (currently stood down)
- Education Authority
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
- Controlled Schools Support Council
- Transferors Representative Council
- Catholic Schools Trustee Services
- Governing Bodies Association

The IEF believes this structure is clearly overly bureaucratic, replicates provision and is a poor use of resources. This system reinforces the current segregated education system and is in urgent need of reform and rationalisation.

Administrative Structures in the NI Education System

(Ulster University Transforming Education Report 09, February 2021 ²²)

Political Representatives		Minister of Education		
		Committee for Education		
Civil Service		Department of Education (DE) • implementing education policy	Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) • Inspection - Quality assurance	
Arms-Length Bodies	Educational Oversight	Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) • Advice and support on curriculum and assessment		General Teaching Council for NI (GTCNI) • Promote teacher professionalism
	Direct Sectoral support +	Education Authority (EA) • Organise educational provision • Employ staff in Controlled schools • Employ non-teaching staff in Catholic Maintained schools	Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) • Employ teaching staff in Catholic Maintained schools • Also serves as a sectoral body to represent and support Catholic Maintained schools	Sectoral support
				NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) • To "encourage and facilitate" integrated education (1989) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) • To "encourage and facilitate" Irish-medium education (1998)
Schools		Controlled Schools • Nursery • Primary • Secondary (non-selective) • Grammar • Special • Controlled Integrated	Controlled Maintained Schools • Nursery • Primary • Secondary (non-selective)	Other School types • Voluntary Grammar Non-denominational & Catholic • Grant Maintained Integrated • Other Maintained • Independent
Non-governmental Support Bodies		Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) • Established in 2016 as 'Third Party Organisation' • Represents the interests of Controlled schools	Catholic Schools Trustee Services (CSTS) • Sectoral body for Catholic schools	Governing Bodies' Association (GBA) • Represents Voluntary Grammars
		Transferors Representative Council (TRC) • Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches		Funding Organisations
				Integrated Education Fund (IEF) • Vision of educating children together as part of the NI reconciliation process
			Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (InaG) • Trust Fund for Irish-medium education	

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## References

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