



ALTE *R* **NATIVE**

MANIFESTO
FOR EDUCATION



EDUCATION IS CENTRAL AND VITAL TO CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY. THIS CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY ESTABLISHING A UNIFIED, COHESIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM.

THIS MANIFESTO SETS OUT OUR SHARED VISION FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUAL NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIETY FREE FROM SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS.

IT IS A 'ROAD-MAP' INDICATING OPPORTUNITIES TO DELIVER SUSTAINABLE CHANGE AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO KEY AREAS OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM.



THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONTEXT

NORTHERN IRELAND MAINTAINS A DUAL, LARGELY SEGREGATED EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT EDUCATES ITS CHILDREN SEPARATELY, BOTH BY RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND THROUGH CRUDE MEASUREMENTS OF ABILITY. APPROXIMATELY 90% OF PUPILS FROM BOTH TRADITIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND REMAIN IN SCHOOLS THAT ARE LARGELY OR EXCLUSIVELY SEGREGATED.

Consequently, pupil interactions are mostly with peers, teachers and others from their own community, with limited opportunity to explore and engage with other beliefs and attitudes. In contrast, the majority of parents wish for their children to be educated together with children of other traditions. A recent poll identified that 79% of parents in Northern Ireland would back a move

to see their children's school change to integrated education.¹ Little choice, however, exists for parents when only 62 schools are integrated. Unless support is given to achieving a single education system, the vast majority of parents will never have that opportunity for their children to be educated together.

WHAT IS INTEGRATED EDUCATION?

INTEGRATED EDUCATION BRINGS CHILDREN, STAFF AND GOVERNORS FROM CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT TRADITIONS, AS WELL AS THOSE OF OTHER FAITHS OR NONE, AND OTHER CULTURES, TOGETHER IN ONE SCHOOL.

Integrated schools differ from most other schools in Northern Ireland by ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds are educated together every day, side by side in the same classrooms. Integrated schools are not secular but are essentially Christian in character while welcoming all faiths and none. Through their admissions criteria, schools aim to ensure a balanced number of Catholic and Protestant children. But it is also the ethos that is particularly distinctive; it is deliberately and strategically planned

to promote inclusiveness and mutual respect. Integrated schools do not simply admit students from different traditions and expect them to fit in, nor to pretend that everyone is the same. For example, Catholic children are offered Sacramental preparation at P3, P4 and P7; at the same time, Protestant children can generally avail of the Delving Deeper programme to develop their own faith knowledge while other pupils are introduced to the ideas, beliefs and practices of the major world

religions and humanist philosophies. In the post-primary schools the integrated ethos is apparent in approaches to Religious Education and History, for example, where sensitive and deliberate care is taken to address different, potentially contentious viewpoints in a balanced and thought-provoking way.

CHILDREN FROM
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SUPPORT THE AMALGAMATION OF THESE INSTITUTIONS INTO A SINGLE SYSTEM OF PROVISION IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A SINGLE EDUCATION SYSTEM

OUR ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE

WE ADVOCATE A MOVE AWAY FROM THE CURRENT DIVISIVE NATURE OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM. WE BELIEVE A UNIFIED EDUCATION SYSTEM IS A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN BREAKING THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND SECTARIANISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND, AND WILL IMPROVE GOOD RELATIONS AMONGST AND FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.

All schools in receipt of public funding should have a duty placed on them to be inclusive spaces so that their policies and practice reflect the diverse range of religious and cultural backgrounds that make up pupils, staff and governors across Northern Ireland schools. Moreover, the Department should ring fence funding for integrated education to enable key measurable indicators to be incorporated within the funding formula for schools and other educational institutions. This financial support would recognise the added value of integrated education with particular emphasis in the curriculum and daily routines on understanding, accepting and respecting political, cultural and religious differences. It should be weighed against the quality and the effectiveness of integration provided to ensure continuous progression towards a desegregated, inclusive system. Progress would be monitored by the

Education and Training Inspectorate or other objective body as appropriate.

Northern Ireland lacks area based planning that is community shaped or led. It fails to reflect parental choice, community needs, the desire held for a shared future or fiscal realities. The delivery of ESA to date has remained a debacle and a squandering of public expenditure. The NI Executive should demonstrate strong leadership and reform the current education administration to establish a single education authority. This will help to reduce duplication and streamline management structures, subsuming the functions, assets and liabilities of the eight education bodies. This will also remove the need for publicly funded sectoral bodies.

Initial teacher education in Northern Ireland is currently provided through five traditional institutions, each with

separate forms of governance: St. Mary's University College; Stranmillis University College; Queen's University Belfast; the University of Ulster and the Open University. The majority of teachers attend institutions which reflect their particular religious affiliation and therefore require support and preparation for the issues, in relation to political, cultural and religious differences, which may arise within the classroom. This requires not just curriculum initiatives but a single system of initial teacher training, continuing professional development, management and school governance training. The NI Executive should support the amalgamation of these institutions into a single system of provision in order to achieve a single education system. We believe that teachers of all faiths and none should be trained together on the same courses at the same locations.

THE FAIR EMPLOYMENT AND TREATMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1998 MAKES IT UNLAWFUL TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST SOMEONE IN RECRUITMENT, EMPLOYMENT OR PROMOTION ON THE GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR POLITICAL OPINION.

At the time of drafting the original fair employment legislation in 1976, concerns about the inclusion of teachers were expressed by various interest groups. Roman Catholic educational interests were concerned that the Act could lead to a system of non-denominational education, with a resulting loss of Catholic ethos. On the other hand, Protestant educational interests were concerned that Protestant teachers would be placed in an unduly unfavourable position. At the time, it was decided to exempt teachers from the provisions of the fair employment legislation. Today, the exemption continues to act as a key aspect of institutional separation in education, enabling schools in the recruitment of teachers to give preference to candidates whose religious beliefs are in accordance with the religious character of the school.

The NI Executive should repeal the exception for teachers in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, to ensure equal opportunity and that teaching staff reflect Northern Ireland's religious and ethnic diversity.

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 it is a legal requirement for public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally; between people with a disability and people without; and between people with dependants and people without. The aim of this requirement is to ensure that every public authority considers equality issues as a central part of their organisational

delivery, rather than an optional extra. Despite much advancement in equality law since 1998, Section 75 does not apply directly to schools. Extending Section 75 would afford pupils and staff the same protection and rights as individuals in other settings. Therefore, the NI Executive should extend Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to apply to all schools.

DUE REGARD TO THE NEED TO PROMOTE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BELIEF, POLITICAL OPINION, RACIAL GROUP, AGE, MARITAL STATUS OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION...



EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOLS DEVELOPING LINKS WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY, IN PARTICULAR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, OTHER SCHOOLS AND VOLUNTARY AND STATUTORY AGENCIES.



ENHANCE THE CURRICULUM TO INCLUDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, STRUCTURES AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT ENABLE SCHOOLS, PUPILS AND THEIR PARENTS, STAFF AND GOVERNORS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO INCREASE THEIR UNDERSTANDING, ACCEPTANCE AND RESPECT FOR POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE.

The composition of Boards of Governors varies depending on a school's management type, and there are a number of different categories of governors. Every School a Good School highlights the importance of schools developing links with the wider community, in particular the business community, other schools and voluntary and statutory agencies.² In Northern Ireland, evidence suggests that, while governors often believe that their Board is representative of the community, this is often not the case.³

Therefore, a single model of governance, which is reflective of wider society, should be developed by the Department of Education. Furthermore, we recommend that the recruitment and selection of governors should be reviewed and made more formal; for example drawing on professional bodies and community groups.

The Department should enhance the curriculum to include the development of skills, structures and relationships that enable schools, pupils and their parents, staff and governors and the

wider community to increase their understanding, acceptance and respect for political, cultural and religious difference. This should be embedded through the ethos of schools and be an integral part of the curriculum to ensure all children can contribute to the shared vision of building a united community. The Department should also develop age appropriate primary and post-primary anti-sectarian resources and ensure that teachers are trained, equipped and supported to deliver these effectively in the classroom.

Integration should inform all future models of social infrastructure, for example the Department for Social Development and Department of Education should establish an inter-departmental strategic approach to mixed housing and integrated education.

² DENI, Every School a Good School, April 2009

³ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2010) School Governors: The Guardians Of Our Schools Bangor: Department of Education

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OUR PRIORITY DEMANDS

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A UNIFIED, COHERENT EDUCATION SYSTEM, THE NI EXECUTIVE SHOULD DELIVER:

- Ring fenced funding to support schools in their progress towards integrated education, measured against key indicators, with particular emphasis in the curriculum and daily routines on understanding, accepting and respecting political, cultural and religious differences.
- Area based planning which is shaped by the community and which reflects parental choice, community needs, desire for a shared future and fiscal realities.
- A single authority for the administration of education.
- A single teacher training system, where teachers of all faiths and none are trained together on the same courses at the same locations.
- A single model of governance for all schools.
- The extension of fair employment legislation to the recruitment of teachers.
- The application of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to schools.