



Consultation Response

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) is an independent charitable trust established in 1992 to provide a financial foundation for the development and growth of integrated education in Northern Ireland. The IEF has raised £15m in the last 12 years from donors in the UK, Ireland, Australia and the USA to support integrated education and innovative shared education work.
2. As a significant investor in education in Northern Ireland, the IEF welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation document on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI). Whilst we welcome its publication, we are very disappointed by the absence of any analysis, vision or focus in the proposals outlined. We are particularly disappointed with the brevity with which education is considered. The document states that *“the Department of Education clearly has a crucial role to play in empowering the next generation within our society and more detail on the range of actions taken by the department is included in other aspects of this document”*; however if the reader’s hopes were raised with the promise of “further detail”, these are sadly dashed with very little detail in evidence. For example, whilst CSI recognises the support for both “mixed religion schooling” and “mixed religion neighbourhoods” it goes much further on housing than education. The document states that “the Department for Social Development will...explore how best to accommodate the aspirations of the majority of the population who wish to live in mixed-religion neighbourhoods.” There is no such ambition for extending integrated education provision.
3. We would also strongly challenge the assumptions made in the document that young people are a problem to be curtailed, particularly those from disadvantaged areas, and that young people are somehow different and distinct in relation to the “wider community”.
4. Overall, CSI is a document that seeks to manage societal divisions as opposed to transforming them. Whilst we might recognize that this document is the best our current political system can produce, we should not be settling as citizens for its significant limitations in moving this society forward. As it currently stands, it is an insult to the significant amount of money from all over the world that has been invested in Northern Ireland, and an insult to the richness of the practice that has grown over the years.
5. We also need to end the nonsense that equality and good relations can either be pursued independently or that they work against each other.

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, designated public authorities such as government departments, including DE, and other bodies such as the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are obliged to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a range of nine different groups in society. Section 75(2) obliges the same public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between different racial, religious and political groups.

6. **Section 75** therefore recognizes that equality is experienced through human relationships, whether in the workplace, at home or in a school where people meet as equals, sensing the acceptability of who they are and all that they bring. **Section 75** also recognizes that relationships built on inequality of power and resources are not sustainable. For example, the fact that 2 in 5 school leavers in 2008/09 (which covers leavers in years 12-14) did not achieve 5+ A*-C GCSEs (including in Maths and English) will not build a cohesive society.

“While schools are not designated public authorities in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the designated educational public authorities have a duty to ensure that all schools comply with the public authorities’ policies and procedures. The promotion of both equality of opportunity and good relations are therefore key to the work of a school.”¹

7. Finally, the quality of this document does not inspire confidence in the willingness within our political system to deliver on its vision of “building a peaceful, secure and shared future for all.” The existence of an independent body that holds government and citizens to account in the reconciliation task should be a non-negotiable. The IEF would be very concerned with the suggestion that the Community Relations Council could be replaced by an advisory panel or “arms length” body. As the recent Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust’s analysis of CSI concluded “it is in the government’s own best interest to create a watchdog, not a poodle.”

8. In light of the absence of any significant content to respond to, we have therefore outlined below our own ideas with regards a plan for sharing and integration in education.

CONTEXT

9. We have an education system which educates its children separately, by religion. According to the Department of Education’s (DE) figures (2009/10) **1% of pupils** enrolled in Catholic maintained schools are Protestant; **5.1% of pupils** enrolled in Controlled schools are Catholic. This is abnormal, not normal, by any standard.

10. In contrast, many people in Northern Ireland want their children to be educated together with children of other traditions. The Life and Times Survey (2009) identified that **62% of people** in Northern Ireland would prefer sending their children to a mixed religion school. Yet, however much support there is for the idea of shared and integrated education, putting it into practice seems exceedingly difficult. This is partly due to institutional resistance to change and significant vested interests; partly due to the segregated nature of our neighbourhoods where much of life is organised separately; partly due to fears around a reduction in quality if schools were opened up; and partly due to the niggling question about ‘whether we trust Them, yet, with the education of Our children.’

11. We are however facing challenging times. The IEF recently welcomed the publication of a scoping paper from Oxford Economics, *Developing the Case for Shared Education*, which

¹ The Good Relations Forum – Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts [CRC & ECNI] April 2010

called for a thorough and fearless debate on new ways to deliver education in Northern Ireland in economically straitened times. Instead of merely coping with a budgetary crisis we should be making choices which positively benefit pupils. The report stated that we cannot continue to fund empty desks while buildings crumble and staffing budgets are squeezed; the status quo is unaffordable. The concept of shared education could provide a radical alternative to cuts and bring about a radical rethink of how money is allocated.

12. We need an education system which serves our children and young people, not our institutions. The cuts in the public budget should be an opportunity to spend smarter....not just an imperative to spend less. A recent research paper by FGS McClure Watters has revealed around a thousand cross-community projects involving collaboration between schools of different management types. It is clear that a significant number of schools, pupils and parents are choosing to work together on a cross-community basis to enhance the educational outcomes of young people and to share limited resources.

However it is also clear that:

- The Department of Education has a clear legislative and policy requirement to support greater levels of sharing across schools, including a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education, but that in the main this has been resourced and encouraged by philanthropic organisations instead of government;
- There are significant levels of cross-community sharing across schools in Northern Ireland and that this growing body of practice coupled with public polls, such as the recent Life and Times survey (2009²) indicate that many people wish for their children to be educated together and that many schools are listening and responding. However, much of this activity is short term, externally funded, by mainly philanthropic organisations, and seen as additional to core educational priorities.
- Shared education was highlighted as a key aspect of the reform agenda for education in the Strategic Review of Education by George Bain. Whilst some of Bain's recommendations have been progressed, shared education has not been given the priority and commitment that is required. There is now an economic imperative to place shared education at the heart of the reform agenda.

13. As we enter a very challenging public expenditure environment, cross-community sharing of resources and skills across schools needs to be given serious consideration by the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that we have an education system that is efficient and effective and prioritises values for money.

² The Life and Times Survey in 2009, where 62% of people indicated that they would prefer to send their children to mixed religion schools.

VISION

An education system that serves all its children together,
contributing to a sustainable society growing at ease with itself.

PRINCIPLES - the '3 Rs'³

- **Reconciliation** (remembering and relationship building)
- **Reconstruction** (rebuilding our schools on the basis of sharing which develops and enhances religious and cultural identities)
- **Responsiveness** (partnership action between parents, young people, citizens and schools)

DEFINITION OF SHARED AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION

14. Shared education is a cross-sectoral approach to education where "*children grow up to feel comfortable in their own uniqueness and comfortable with difference. For that to happen, they need to be able to work together and 'play' together so that eventually, they can assume a shared responsibility for their future.*" (Bain Review) In Northern Ireland, this will require the various sectors (Controlled; Maintained; Irish Medium; Integrated; Voluntary Grammar) maximising the opportunity to collaborate in the provision of education.

The Review on Inter-School Collaboration identified a variety of approaches to shared and collaborative education defined by the extent and depth of the relationships. The Review identified three core principles, which shape the range or spectrum of shared education processes:

- **Organisation** - how far do organisational structures support collaboration?
This might range from a small project working group between two schools to an integrated school which is a whole school structure focused on sharing and integration;
- **Depth** - how deeply into the fabric of the school is the sharing developed?
For example, does it involve a whole school such as an integrated school or one particular department or class?; and
- **Joint Investment** - to what extent do the partner organisations involved agree on a vision for sharing?

³ Adapted from Public Achievement.

Do the schools involved see their future sustainability as determined by the principles of cross-community sharing and collaboration ending ultimately, for example, in a merger or amalgamation.

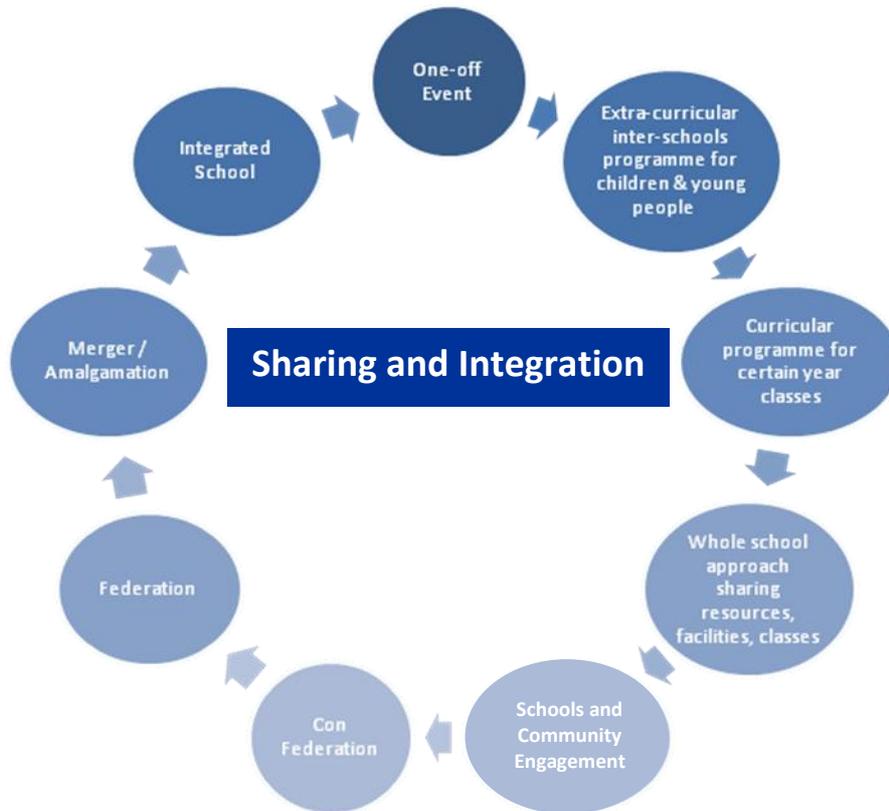


Figure 1 Sharing and Integration

SHARING AND INTEGRATION PLAN⁴

The IEF believes that a ten year plan needs to be put in place by the Executive to encourage, facilitate and nurture the growth of shared and integrated education as a key government priority. Without such a plan, the next five years might see the growth of a more efficient, streamlined segregated education system as rationalisation takes place within each sector. This would have significant implications for future generations of children as well as the sustainability of this society as a place where citizens live and work at ease with each other.

Legal

1. All schools in receipt of public money to be required by law to be '**shared spaces**' and be actively working towards being open to children of all faiths and none. This would be demonstrated through, for example, governance arrangements, the delivery of the curriculum, symbols and emblems, and the provision of sporting and cultural activities. The vision has already been developed in the policy "Every School a Good School – Supporting Newcomer Pupils"; it just needs to be extended to all children, not just newcomer children.

A whole-school approach is needed to ensure that all children and young people, no matter in which school they are enrolled, what community or country they come from or in what part of the country they live, can fully participate in the school curriculum.

2. Ensure that any forthcoming legislation with regards area based planning at primary and post-primary levels, **privileges the voices of young people, parents and communities** and takes account of the wider imperatives of a shared future and parental choice around shared and integrated education.
3. The removal of the exemption currently provided within the Fair Employment and Treatment Order with regards the recruitment of new teachers.

Policy

4. **Sharing and integration** to drive educational reform, with the Department of Education allocating appropriate resources to enable this to happen.
5. The **religious balance** of all schools in relation to the religious balance in the school's catchment area to be made available.
6. In decision making on new schools or reorganisation/rationalization of schools, **development proposals** will be required to demonstrate that options for collaboration and sharing on a cross-sectoral basis have been considered and fully explored.

⁴ A number of these recommendations have been adapted from *A Shared Future: The Policy and Strategy Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* (2005) and *Triennial Action Plan 2006/09*; and the joint paper by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Community Relations Council *Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts* (2010)

7. A **shared/integrated model of schooling** will be treated as the presumed option for new housing developments.
8. DE to develop and publish a **strategy on the community use of schools** in line with the recommendations of the Working Group Report on *Community Use of School Premises* (June 2010).
9. DE, local schools and elected representatives will always keep **parents and local communities** fully informed of all the possibilities and options for collaboration, particularly on a cross-community basis, when local schools are being considered for closure or new schools are being planned.
10. The Department for Social Development and DE to develop an **inter-departmental strategic approach** to developing shared housing and shared education.
11. The **Child Poverty Strategy** being developed by OFMDFM recognizes the poverty consequences of a segregated education system with associated actions and outcomes identified.

Structures

12. DE to provide support, both **developmental and financial**, to schools wishing to collaborate and to explore mergers, amalgamations and integration across different management types.
13. All sectoral support bodies to be merged into a single administrative body. There should be **no separate sectoral funding** from DE for administration.

Funding

14. A **review** to be carried out by the Department of Education or by independent sources on the financial costs (recurrent and capital) and savings generated from alternative education delivery options over a 25-year timeframe. Options to include the 'status quo' and alternative forms of shared education, ranging from greater collaboration between schools, to school mergers and amalgamations, to shared/integrated schools.⁵
15. All schools in receipt of **public funding** must prove they are actively open to children of all faiths and none and in particular those children from the minority community. A school's inclusive ethos to be verified by the **Education and Training Inspectorate** using qualitative and quantitative measures. This would include, for example, the make-up of the Board of Governors, symbols and emblems, delivery of the curriculum, bullying incidents, and available cultural and sporting facilities.

⁵ Similar reviews have been carried out such as the *Scottish Government Budget Options – Briefing Series No 1 Spending on School Education* (2009) and the *Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programme* (2009) commissioned by the Irish Government.

17. On the basis of clear criteria, projects relating to new schools, reorganisation or rationalisation are more likely to justify receipt of public money if they are shared/integrated or **operate on a cross-sectoral basis**.
18. **DE Common Funding Formula** to include financial support for schools with mixed enrolment based on religious balance in the school's catchment area and support for inter-sectoral collaboration at primary and post-primary level.

Schools

19. An expectation that **trainee teachers** experience placements in a variety of different schools.
20. The Education and Library Boards to support **governors** in understanding their role and responsibilities in growing a shared school for all.
21. All new **parents** are provided with clear and accessible information on the school's obligations with regards equality and good relations.
22. All teachers are required both in their training and ongoing professional development to build their skills and confidence in dealing with **contentious political and historical issues**.
23. All teachers to be offered the opportunity to undertake an **RE Certificate for Education** which would be acceptable to all schools.
24. **Religious education** to ensure that students are exposed to a broad range of religious traditions and to the non-religious interpretation of life at primary and post-primary level.
25. **The curriculum** at primary and post primary levels to automatically start with an understanding of Northern Ireland's historic and current divisions using, for example, subjects such as history and geography.

FINAL WORD

The IEF does not believe that CSI, as it stands, will achieve its stated purpose: "*build a peaceful, secure and shared future for all*". In particular, we do not believe that it sets a clear direction and intent on the part of government with regards growing shared and integrated education. Choosing where to live and choosing where to send your child to school are deeply interlinked and fundamentally shaped by the need to keep safe. Safety, however, does not lie in separation but in interdependence. This is where CSI needs to be taking us.