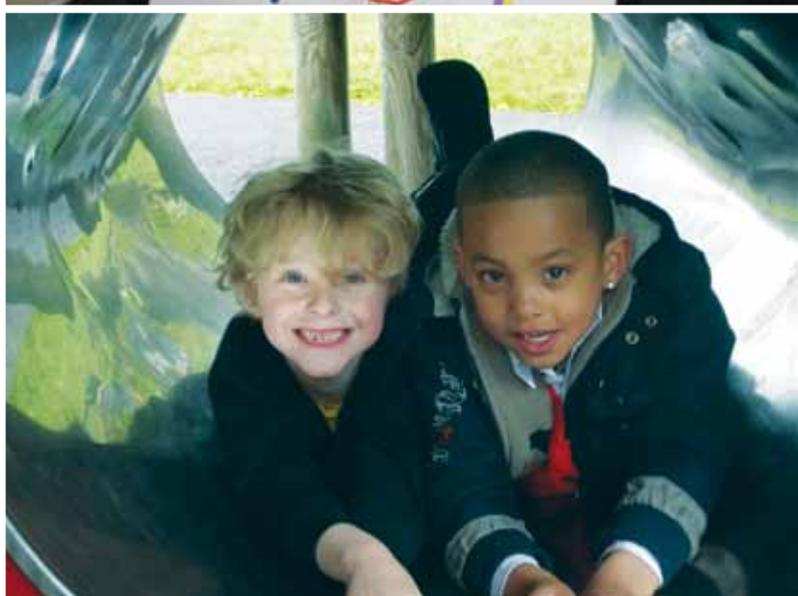


# Advancing Shared Education

March 2013



Report of the

## Ministerial Advisory Group

Professor Paul Connolly, Dawn Purvis and PJ O'Grady



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## PREFACE

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This report presents our vision for how shared education can best be taken forward in Northern Ireland. We were appointed in July 2012 by John O’Dowd MLA, Minister of Education, to explore and bring forward recommendations to him on how to advance shared education in the region. Our appointment represents the first of three key commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government 2011-15 regarding shared education. The intention is that this report will inform the development of a strategy to achieve the other two commitments; namely that all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes and that there is a substantial increase in the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.

Since our appointment we have engaged in a widespread consultation exercise with key stakeholders across the region and visited a number of schools, colleges and institutions across Northern Ireland, including those involved in shared education. In addition we have directly sought the views of parents and children and young people and also undertaken a review of the evidence that currently exists, both locally in Northern Ireland and also nationally and internationally, regarding different models of shared education and their effectiveness.

We see our vision of shared education – where schools collaborate across sectors to ensure that all children and young people have opportunities to learn together – as providing a framework for creating a world-class education system for Northern Ireland. We therefore do not view shared education as just another policy initiative but rather as the core mechanism for improving schools, increasing educational outcomes for all children and young people and preparing them to play a full and active role in building and sustaining an open, inclusive and confident society.

We are under no illusions regarding the enormity of the task ahead. Our education system remains deeply divided, not just in relation to religion but also in terms of social class where there are clear trends at post-primary level for those young people from more

affluent backgrounds to attend grammar schools and those from less affluent backgrounds to attend secondary schools. Moreover, there remain significant concerns regarding the marginalisation and underachievement of those from low socio-economic backgrounds and also of particular sub-groups of children and young people.

While there are difficult challenges ahead, we remain optimistic about the potential for shared education to address these problems and to help build an education system that can genuinely become one of the best in the world. However, achieving this will require some fundamental changes to how our education system is organised and the way schools operate.

While our recommendations are therefore ambitious and challenging, they are also realistic and achievable. In the context of the area-based planning process and also the rationalisation of the education support sector through the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that shared education is at the heart of the new system.

Our main fear is that this opportunity to transform our education system will be lost if key stakeholders simply retreat into, and seek to defend, their respective interests and sectors. Our children and young people deserve better than this. What we need is an open and wide-ranging debate about the future of our education system that is driven by a desire to improve the quality of education and outcomes for all children and young people, that is informed by evidence and that puts the interests and rights of children and young people at its heart. We sincerely hope that our report can help stimulate such a debate.

**Professor Paul Connolly (Chair)**  
**Mr P J O'Grady**  
**Ms Dawn Purvis**

March 2013

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank a number of people and organisations for supporting us in our work and making this report possible.

We are indebted to the wide range of individuals and organisations that gave of their time and made considerable efforts to engage with us through making written submissions and meeting with us. We are also extremely grateful to Parenting NI and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) for facilitating direct consultation with parents and children and young people respectively. Moreover we would like to thank all of the parents, children and young people who participated in these various consultation exercises. The views we gained through all of these processes have been invaluable in helping to inform and develop our thinking.

We are also grateful to Tsvety Donova, Lisa Graham, Jacqueline Mullen and Kirsty Smyth for undertaking and summarising the findings of existing research evidence and practice. Moreover, we would particularly like to thank Katrina Lloyd for organising and overseeing this work and for preparing the subsequent drafts of Sections 4 and 6 of this report.

Finally, we would like to thank the Department of Education and particularly Andrew Bell, Edith Preston and Chris Stewart for their support over the last seven months. We are especially grateful to Catherine Bell who was seconded from the Department on a full-time basis to provide administrative support to us over this period. Our work would not have been possible without her.

Needless to say, we take full responsibility for the content of this report and the recommendations made.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

Northern Ireland is a society emerging out of a sustained period of armed conflict. For over 25 years, and during the period commonly referred to as 'The Troubles' (1969-1994), over 3,600 people in the region lost their lives and a further 40,000 were injured. Not surprisingly, this violence led to significant population shifts and increasing segregation as the two main religious/political communities, Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists, sought to protect themselves.

Since the ceasefires of the mid-1990s, there has been a clear movement towards peace. While there have been setbacks and intermittent periods of violence, there is a sense that Northern Ireland is now emerging out of conflict as devolved government has been restored and politicians from across the political divide begin to work together.

The legacy of the conflict remains however, with nearly half of the population continuing to live in areas that are predominantly Protestant/unionist or Catholic/nationalist. In relation to education, the vast majority of children and young people in primary and post-primary schools (92.6%) attend either Catholic maintained schools or schools that are either state controlled or voluntary and that are mainly attended by Protestant children and young people.

Moreover, the education system in Northern Ireland currently experiences significant divisions in other respects as well. The most notable of these is in relation to socio-economic background where a clear tendency exists at post-primary level for young people from more affluent backgrounds to attend grammar schools and those from more economically deprived backgrounds to attend non-grammar schools. These divisions are, in turn, associated with significant achievement gaps.

There also remain concerns as to whether the educational and social needs of particular groups of children and young people are being met,

including: Irish Travellers; black and minority ethnic children and young people; children and young people in care; children and young people with disabilities and those with special educational needs; and children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT).

This report presents the findings of the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education that was appointed by the Education Minister in July 2012. Given the context outlined above, the Group was asked by the Minister to advise him on how best 'shared education' might be taken forward to meet the needs of all learners and to provide for children and young people from a variety of backgrounds to be educated together.

In undertaking this work, the Ministerial Advisory Group was asked to bear in mind wider education policy changes and initiatives taking place in Northern Ireland including:

- The reorganisation of the education sector in relation to the new unitary Education and Skills Authority;
- The major review of the existing schools estate being taken forward through the area based planning process;
- The review of the common funding formula for schools being led by Sir Robert Salisbury; and
- A range of key policy initiatives including, for example: the post-14 Entitlement Framework; the Department of Education's *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity* policy; the Department's overall framework for raising standards and tackling gaps in attainment, *Every School a Good School*; the review of teacher education; and a range of reviews of proposed frameworks in relation to such areas as early years provision, Irish medium education and special educational needs and inclusion.

Whilst mindful of the enormity of its task, the Ministerial Advisory Group also recognises that this period of change provides a unique opportunity

to influence how these changes might best be steered to ensure that the needs of all learners are met and that children and young people from across the different divides can learn together.

## **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group were to advise the Minister on how best to advance 'shared education' in Northern Ireland, within the context of overall education policy and the aim of improving educational outcomes for learners.

The Group was asked by the Minister to take a broad focus in relation to 'education': from preschool through to primary and post-primary schools, special education provision and the youth services. It was also asked to take account of: the evidence on the preferences of learners and parents; the evidence on the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches and of best practice locally and internationally; any barriers to the advancement of 'shared education'; and how 'shared education' might best address issues such as ethos and identity.

The definition of 'shared education' that the Ministerial Advisory Group was asked to use involved the organisation and delivery of education so that it:

- Meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of, learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status;
- Involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and
- Delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

## Working Methods

Since its appointment, the Ministerial Advisory Group has engaged in a widespread consultation exercise with key stakeholders across the region that has resulted in: the receipt of 111 written submissions from a wide range of organisations and individuals; 25 face-to-face meetings with a range of stakeholders; and visits to a number of examples of shared education in practice and other schools, colleges and institutions across Northern Ireland. All of the written submissions, together with full transcripts of all of the face-to-face meetings are available on the Group's website.

In addition, the Group has been supported by Parenting NI in seeking the views of parents and by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in seeking the views of children and young people. Alongside this work, the Ministerial Advisory Group has also undertaken a review of the evidence that currently exists, both locally in Northern Ireland and also nationally and internationally, regarding different models of shared education and their effectiveness.

Through all of its work, the Group has been guided by the need to be:

- *Outcomes-focused* and concerned with what works best for improving the education of all learners;
- *Evidence-informed* and committed to ensuring that any advice given is based upon the best available evidence; and
- *Children's rights-based* and committed to ensuring that the work of the Group and the advice it makes to the Minister are all fully compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant human rights standards.

## Definitions

In taking into account a wide range of evidence submitted, the Ministerial Advisory Group endorses the broadened definition of 'shared education' provided in the Minister's terms of reference. As such:

Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

The focus of shared education should encompass early childhood services through to primary and post-primary schools, further education colleges (that currently fall under the remit of the Department for Employment and Learning) and special education provision and youth services. By 'different sectors', the definition refers to schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.

By 'collaboration', the Ministerial Advisory Group refers to a range of sustained activities that schools and other educational institutions can be engaged in together locally to achieve the aims set out in the definition. However, these activities must include two key elements:

- Teachers across the schools and/or educational institutions working together, whether that be in relation to training and professional development activities or curriculum planning and the delivery of lessons; and
- Children and young people from across those schools and/or educational institutions actively learning together through face-to-face interaction, whether that is working together on specific projects or through participation in the same classes and/or the same sporting and extra-curricular activities.

Teachers' coming together from different schools for the purposes of professional development does not count, in itself, as an example of 'shared education'. Similarly, schools that bring children and young people together for isolated events, such as a school quiz or Christmas carol singing, also does not count, in itself, as 'shared education'.

## Vision, Values and Key Principles

At the heart of this definition of shared education is a vision of change that sees sustained and meaningful collaboration between schools at local level helping to improve the quality of educational provision and raise standards while also, in encouraging sustained and meaningful contact between children and young people from different backgrounds, helping to build a greater understanding and respect for diversity and thus contribute to a more open, inclusive and confident society.

It is with this in mind that the Ministerial Advisory Group identifies two values that stem from the definition of shared education above and that should be at the heart of any future education system. These values also are in line with the current vision of the Department of Education, the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and key policies, including *Every School a Good School*:

- An ability to recognise and respond to the diverse range of talents and abilities that exist among children and young people to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to reach their full potential at each stage of their development; and
- An emphasis on developing the whole child so that they have a strong sense of their own identity and an understanding and respect for others and that they are able to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills to enable them to make a full and positive contribution to building a prosperous, open, diverse and inclusive society.

From the wide range of submissions received and evidence considered, and guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), it is clear that there are seven key principles that need be at the heart of efforts to advance shared education. These combine to create a blueprint for education that:

1. Welcomes and celebrates diversity and respects the right of children and young people to be educated in accordance with their own religious, cultural or philosophical traditions while also ensuring that they develop an understanding and respect for others by having significant and meaningful opportunities to be educated together with those from different backgrounds;
2. Ensures that all children have access to a quality education and enjoy equal opportunities within the education system, and thus has a particular concern with identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people from vulnerable and/or marginalised backgrounds;
3. Is built upon strong links with parents and care-givers, fostered in early childhood and maintained throughout each child's progression through the education system, and respects the role they play in supporting their child's education and development;
4. Provides all children and young people with a broad-based and holistic education whilst also ensuring that this is progressively tailored to meet their individual needs and to help develop their particular strengths and talents to the fullest;
5. Helps children and young people develop a greater awareness of and respect for diversity, in all its forms, and equips them with the knowledge and skills to be able to live in an open, inclusive and confident society;
6. Respects the rights and dignity of all children and young people, ensures that their views and opinions are heard and responded to and promotes their safety and wellbeing; and
7. Acknowledges the central importance of good leadership in schools and the quality of teachers and support staff and thus places a particular emphasis on ensuring high quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities that encourage teachers and educationalists learning and sharing together.

## **Existing Approaches to Shared Education**

There now exists a strong and compelling body of research evidence internationally that demonstrates the benefits of schools collaborating together across sectors in a sustained and meaningful way.

Schools that work together in relation to the sharing of resources, expertise and good practice, and that bring their children together to engage in meaningful educational activities, have been shown to produce clear and measurable improvements in outcomes compared to those that do not. Similarly, there is overwhelming evidence internationally that when meaningful and sustained opportunities are provided for children and young people from different backgrounds to learn together then this can result in improved attitudes and relationships.

In Northern Ireland, there have been laudable examples over the years of a variety of programmes, policies and initiatives aimed at developing and enhancing opportunities for children and young people from across the religious divide to learn together and for schools from across different sectors to work together to share expertise and resources.

Such efforts have been given increased momentum since 2007 with the efforts of the Sharing Education Programme, based at the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast, and the shared education initiatives delivered by Fermanagh Trust and the North Eastern Education and Library Board through its Primary Integrating/Enriching Education Project. Together, these three programmes have involved 66 partnerships drawing together over 210 schools and 16,000 children and young people across Northern Ireland. Each of these partnerships has involved schools engaging in cross-sectoral collaboration concentrating on substantive, curriculum-based activities.

These programmes have, in turn, generated a substantial evidence base demonstrating that:

- Cross-sector collaboration between schools, even in very difficult and religiously-divided localities, is possible;
- Shared education provides an important mechanism for ensuring that children and young people have access to a wider range of subjects and courses and thus enabling the delivery of the entitlement framework;
- Collaboration between schools provides a welcomed and effective means for teachers to share good practice and engage in professional development; and
- Most children and young people and their parents and/or care-givers involved in these initiatives find the experience a positive one and there is evidence that, for the majority, such experiences are encouraging more positive attitudes and relationships between children and young people from different backgrounds.

There are also, however, some very clear and consistent messages emerging from this substantial body of practice:

- There is no 'one size fits all' model for how schools should collaborate but, rather, how this is done will vary from one context to the next;
- It is important that particular models of collaboration are not imposed on schools but that they are allowed to develop organically, reflecting the needs and situations that exist at a local level;
- The existing funding model for schools tends to create competition between schools and can inhibit the extent to which schools feel able to genuinely collaborate;
- There are clear resource implications for schools and other educational institutions wishing to engage in shared education and thus some mechanism for supporting and

incentivising schools to be involved in cross-sectoral collaboration is required;

- School collaboration is not easy and presents significant practical challenges in relation to matters such as timetabling, curriculum planning and transport and thus strong leadership within schools is essential; and
- The current process of area-based planning provides considerable potential to take forward the vision of shared education. Moreover, the Department of Education's guidance in its Terms of Reference includes the need to consider 'opportunities for shared schooling on a cross-sectoral basis'. However, there is limited evidence of a commitment to developing such cross-sectoral collaboration within the current plans within each of the Education and Library Boards for the post-primary sector.

In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that there are particular issues that need to be addressed for children and young people and parents engaging in shared education programmes in areas that continue to experience high degrees of segregation and poor community relations. For example, some children and young people reported feeling uncomfortable and intimidated when visiting other schools. In addition, there is evidence that engagement in shared education activities for those living in areas where there is low positive contact between communities may increase negative attitudes in the short term.

## **The Perspectives of Parents and Learners**

The existing evidence available, together with the findings arising from the consultation exercises with parents and with children and young people, suggests there is clear support for shared education in principle but that there are a number of concerns regarding how it will work in practice.

The evidence suggests that the vast majority of parents, children and young people feel that sharing facilities, sharing classes and doing projects with children from other schools is a good idea. Moreover, those

that have taken part in shared education programmes have tended to report very positive experiences. They have identified a range of benefits including: being able to mix with those from different backgrounds to themselves; enhancing learning opportunities; and having access to a wider range of activities and subjects than they would otherwise have.

The parents, children and young people also raised a number of common concerns that tended to focus on a range of logistical issues regarding the problems of timetabling and the transportation and supervision of children and young people between schools.

In addition, and through the many consultation groups undertaken by NICCY, children and young people raised a number of more specific concerns in relation to their experiences of shared education initiatives. These included: worries regarding being bullied; only having limited or negative interactions with other children and young people; and feeling vulnerable and out of place. In addition, some young people expressed concerns regarding the inappropriateness of young people from grammar and non-grammar schools engaging in shared activities and classes.

The children and young people involved in the focus groups made a number of suggestions for how shared education might best be advanced. On some issues, the children and young people had differing views. However, the key points where there was broad agreement were the need to:

- Begin shared education early, especially in pre-school and primary school;
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to meet prior to beginning shared projects or classes in order to develop relationships;
- Focus on subjects and activities that involved practical activities and working together, including technology, art, PE, science and music; and

- Consult children and young people when planning shared activities.

## **Integrated Education and Shared Education**

The Ministerial Advisory Group recognises the significant efforts of parents over the last 30 years to develop an integrated education system for their children and the gains they have made in this regard. Latest figures indicate that there now exist 62 integrated schools (42 primary and 20 post-primary) educating just over 21,500 children and young people that have, as a fundamental goal, the need for Catholic, Protestant and other children to be taught together, under one roof. Moreover, integrated schools have a clear Christian ethos and seek to provide for the different faith-based needs of the Protestant and Catholic children and young people whilst meeting the needs of those of other religious faiths and none.

It has been suggested by representatives and members of the integrated sector that integrated schooling represents the most effective and efficient model for shared education and that the promotion of integrated schools should be at the heart of any attempts to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. Moreover, significant concerns have been expressed regarding the perceived failure of the Department of Education to fulfil its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education.

The Ministerial Advisory Group notes these concerns and the fact that while other sectors are to be represented in the new Education and Skills Authority, there are currently no plans in the Education Bill for the integrated sector to have representation. However, the Group does not agree that integrated schools should be viewed and actively promoted as the 'preferred option' in relation to plans to advance shared education.

Parents and children have the right to their religious, cultural and philosophical beliefs being respected. The vision of the Ministerial Advisory Group, as set out above, is therefore predicated on parental choice. Where there is sufficient parental demand, the system should

actively encourage the development of a range of schools with differing types of religious, philosophical and/or cultural ethos.

For some parents this will mean a preference for an integrated school so that their children can learn in a multi-faith environment, while for others it will mean a preference for a particular faith-based school or for a secular school. The key issue, for the Ministerial Advisory Group, is that while the vision of a plurality of different schools is respected and encouraged, this must be within the context where strong efforts are made to ensure that these different types of school collaborate together in a sustained and meaningful manner to ensure that educational standards are enhanced for all children and young people and good relations are promoted.

It is in this respect that the Ministerial Advisory Group views integrated schools as a sector, rather than as a model of shared education. As a distinctive school sector that reflects a particular religious and philosophical ethos, the Department of Education should make every effort to ensure that parental demand for integrated schools is met, where this is feasible, as it should for any other type of school.

However, promoting one particular school sector runs counter to the vision of a diverse and plural system outlined above and is not a model for advancing shared education. By definition, shared education involves schools and other educational institutions of different types and from different sectors collaborating together. Actively promoting one sector over other sectors will not only be divisive but it will not, in itself, lead to the educational benefits that accrue from schools sharing good practice and collaborating together; nor will it necessarily ensure that children and young people from a wider range of backgrounds learn together.

## **Academic Selection at 11 and Shared Education**

Within the existing shared education initiatives there are a number of examples of successful collaborations between grammar and non-grammar schools. While this is to be welcomed, it is clear from the evidence that the existing system of academic selection at the age of 11

presents a serious obstacle to fully realising the vision and key principles set out above for a shared education system.

This obstacle can be seen in three key respects. Firstly, there is clear evidence of a social class divide in relation to the young people that attend grammar and secondary schools. For example, the odds of those entitled to free school meals securing a place at a grammar school are nearly five times lower than others. The selective system therefore works against the vision of children and young people learning together from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Moreover, and secondly, there is clear evidence that a child's or young person's educational opportunities differ depending on whether he or she attends a grammar or secondary school. When comparing like-with-like, the odds of a young person achieving the basic standard at 16 of five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C, including English and maths, in Northern Ireland are over three and a half times higher if they attend a grammar school compared to a secondary school.

The consequences of the particular selective system in operation in Northern Ireland therefore not only generates divisions and militates against children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds working together but, equally importantly, it undermines the fundamental rights of all children and young people, under the universal United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to non-discrimination.

This link between selective educational systems and increased achievement gaps between children in relation to socio-economic background is also well established in the international research literature. This is equally true for Northern Ireland where the achievement gap is higher than in comparison with England. While the odds of young people entitled to free schools meals not achieving the basic standard of five GCSE A\*-C passes at 16 are three times higher than other young people in England, this figure rises to being four times higher in Northern Ireland.

It is because of this link between the particular system of academic selection in Northern Ireland and the wider achievement gap in the

region that the UN Committee on the Rights of Child has raised specific concerns regarding the selective system in its last two country reports.

Thirdly, the maintenance of distinct grammar and secondary schools will continue to impede the most effective rationalisation of the schools estate through the area-based planning process. At the post-primary level, it will ensure that there are a larger number of schools than are needed for each local area. This is not only wasteful but it will leave some schools, largely secondary schools, remaining vulnerable to falling numbers and reduced funding.

Removing the ability of post-primary schools to select on the basis of academic criteria will enable the development of a smaller number of larger schools that will each have the economies of scale to deliver the entitlement framework while also enabling strong and sustainable collaborative relationships to develop with other schools in their locality.

It is for the three reasons above that the view of the Ministerial Advisory Group is that advances in relation to shared education will remain seriously limited while the current system of academic selection at age 11 continues in Northern Ireland. In making this argument, however, the Group is keen to stress two points.

Firstly, the Group is concerned not to impede the progress that has already been made in relation to advancing shared education. As outlined above, there is widespread support for advancing shared education even within the current selective system and also an impressive body of evidence of good practice to build upon in this regard. As such, the lack of a political consensus regarding the future of academic selection should not be an obstacle to making significant progress now regarding implementing the first 17 of the 20 recommendations made below.

Secondly, the Ministerial Advisory Group recognises that academic selection, *within* schools with all-ability intakes, can have an important role to play in relation to ensuring that all children and young people are able to receive a bespoke education that is tailored to their particular skills and talents and thus ensures that they reach their fullest potential. However, this can best be achieved through a more flexible and

sophisticated system of banding and streaming within schools that recognises that each child and young person develops at a different rate and is likely to have strengths in certain areas while possibly requiring additional support in others.

In this sense, the current system that only offers two educational pathways – grammar or secondary – and that determines which pathway a child will follow based upon one high-stakes and currently unregulated test at the age of 11 is divisive, archaic and not fit for purpose. As such, if the true vision for shared education is to be realised then the current system of academic selection for education needs to be replaced with a more sophisticated system of selection within education.

## Recommendations

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The recommendations set out below reflect a view of shared education as providing a central mechanism for improving the quality of educational provision, expanding the range of opportunities open to children and young people and for preparing them with the skills required to make a full and active contribution to building an inclusive society based upon respect for diversity and difference. As such, shared education is not viewed merely as an 'add on' to the mainstream business of education. Rather, it is seen as the key driver for creating and sustaining a world-class education system.

Given the wide-ranging and systemic nature of the recommendations made below, it has not been possible to undertake a detailed assessment of the likely costs associated with implementing these. However, the Ministerial Advisory Group notes that there are likely to be significant savings associated with some aspects of the advancement of shared education while other aspects will require additional investments. It is therefore quite possible that the implementation of the recommendations below would be cost-neutral.

Moreover, the Group notes that a number of international funding bodies have expressed an interest in helping support the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland, including the International Fund for Ireland and The Atlantic Philanthropies. In addition, consultations undertaken by the Special European Union Programme Body in relation to its next phase of peace funding for Northern Ireland have identified education as a clear priority area. It is quite possible, therefore, that a strong commitment to advancing shared education in Northern Ireland may attract significant levels of new investment in the region.

It is with the above in mind that the Ministerial Advisory Group makes the following 20 recommendations:

## Mainstreaming Shared Education

1. The Education Bill should be amended to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education and the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to encourage and facilitate shared education as defined in this report. This should include reviewing all existing and proposed policies within education, and providing advice as required, to ensure that all activities seek to encourage and facilitate shared education where appropriate.
2. ESA should establish a central unit, or identify an existing unit, that should take lead responsibility for encouraging and facilitating shared education. This unit should:
  - Develop and drive forward a strategy for advancing shared education that includes setting targets and goals, monitoring shared education activities and producing an annual report on progress being made;
  - Establish and maintain a regional structure for supporting schools and other educational institutions engaged in shared education; and
  - Commission research and evaluations into shared education and facilitate the sharing and dissemination of good practice.
3. As part of the proposed revised common funding formula suggested by Sir Robert Salisbury in his independent review for the Department of Education, a 'shared education premium' should be incorporated into the funding formula for schools and other educational institutions. This premium would recognise the added value of shared education and should be weighted in terms of:
  - The number of children and young people that are engaged in shared education activities, as defined in this report; and
  - The proportion of school time that children and young people are engaged in such activities.

## Supporting Schools in Shared Education

4. Where schools and other educational institutions are in receipt of a shared education premium, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include an explicit review of the use of that funding in its inspection reports particularly in relation to:
  - The added value of such shared education activities;
  - The value for money of the funding provided; and
  - The quality and effectiveness of the shared education activities.
5. The ETI should produce a biennial report that reviews the current range and extent of shared education activities across Northern Ireland, highlights good practice and makes recommendations regarding how these could be extended and enhanced, within the overall context of school improvement.
6. The Department of Education, in its review of teacher education and continuing professional development, should develop a framework for supporting the early and continuing professional development of teachers that encourages its delivery through shared education and thus via effective collaboration between schools and other educational institutions. It is recommended that such a framework should encourage collaborative networks of schools and other educational institutions identifying their own professional development needs and being devolved appropriate levels of funding through the common funding formula to commission the training, courses and/or other support that they require from the most appropriate providers.
7. ESA should ensure that all teachers and principals in schools and other educational establishments have access to a range of training courses and resource materials, and ongoing advice and support, to help them develop the particular knowledge and skills associated with effectively organising and managing shared education activities and classes. This should include a focus on:

- Establishing and organising collaborative activities, projects and classes between schools and other educational establishments;
  - Ensuring the meaningful participation of children and young people in the planning and delivery of shared education initiatives (see also Recommendation 11);
  - Promoting positive relationships and dealing constructively with any negative incidents and poor interactions between children and young people that may arise;
  - Covering sensitive topics and issues which might arise in the context of a diverse group of children and young people; and
  - Developing and maintaining meaningful and effective relationships with parents and other care-givers.
8. The Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the higher education institutions responsible for delivering teacher training and professional development courses, should review existing provision to consider appropriate mechanisms for collaboration to ensure that student teachers and teachers returning for professional development can be provided with opportunities to learn together, including in relation to preparation for teaching through shared education.

### Schools and Other Educational Institutions

9. Schools and other educational establishments should develop more meaningful relationships with parents and caregivers to ensure that their rights to be involved in the education of their children are fully respected and supported. To achieve this, it is recommended that:
- ESA establish an appropriate network that supports schools and other educational institutions in developing relationships with parents and care-givers and in creating and sharing best practice regionally; and

- Schools and other educational establishments include a specific section in their Development Plans, that includes clear plans and goals, for how they intend to engage parents and caregivers and ensure their active and sustained support in the education of their children.

10. An independent review should be undertaken of current practice in relation to the delivery of:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (Pre-School Education);
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2);
- Local and Global Citizenship (Key Stages 3 and 4); and
- The Curriculum Framework for Youth Work (Youth Service).

The review should consider the effectiveness of the current Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy and also include consideration of the opportunities that are provided for children and young people to discuss and explore issues associated with divisions, conflict and inequalities in Northern Ireland. The review should make recommendations regarding the content of these areas of learning and also how teachers and other educationalists can best be supported to deliver these.

11. In fulfilment of its duties under Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Department of Education should make it a requirement that all schools establish School Councils. Within this, School Councils need to:

- Be fully representative of the school body and of all year groups;
- Provide a mechanism for consulting children and young people on all school matters that affect them, including plans for shared education activities;

- Support children and young people in forming and expressing their views; and
  - Include appropriate mechanisms for the views of children and young people to then be considered and given due weight by the school.
12. The necessary legislation should be brought forward for schools and other educational institutions to be designated as 'public authorities' under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and thus to be required to comply with the statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. In doing this, consideration should be given to whether it is possible to reduce the demands that will be placed on schools and other educational institutions in terms of meeting their specific responsibilities under Section 75 whilst maintaining their core duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
13. The Education and Skills Authority, in conjunction with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, should establish a unit to provide training, produce support materials and to advise schools and educational institutions in relation to preparing, implementing and monitoring the equality schemes they would be required to produce under Section 75. It is expected that one aspect of meeting the duty to promote good relations will include engagement in shared education initiatives.
14. The Department of Education should undertake a review of how shared education, and the enhanced collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools and educational support centres, can most effectively meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with special educational needs. The review should focus on the development of effective models for collaboration that can:
- Ensure, wherever possible, that children and young people are taught in mainstream schools; and

- For the small minority of children and young people where mainstream schooling is not suitable, that they have meaningful opportunities to learn with children and young people in mainstream school environments.

### Area-Based Planning and the Schools Estate

15. The Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and the CCMS should play an active role in promoting shared education through the area-based planning processes for post-primary and primary schools. This should include:
  - Being proactive in identifying opportunities for shared education that may not have been considered and setting out options for schools and colleges to consider; and
  - Supporting and advising schools that wish to develop shared education arrangements, including providing advice on how two or more schools can transfer their status into a 'shared school' whereby they maintain their respective forms of ethos.
16. Where there is sufficient, viable and consistent parental demand, the Department of Education should actively support the establishment of schools and other educational institutions with a particular religious, philosophical or cultural ethos.
17. In relation to all existing schools, the Department of Education should:
  - Establish a transformation process for schools where there is clear parental demand wishing to adopt a particular ethos – whether, for example, this be faith-based, integrated, secular or Irish Medium – and to ensure that it is user

friendly and not bureaucratic and that parents are made aware of their powers under the processes established;

- Identify how, in the light of parental demand, the process can be made easier whereby a school can incorporate the badge of a particular school type or sector in its title; and
- While recognizing the responsibility of the Department to ensure the viability of schools in each local area, where there is clear evidence of over-subscription, it should allow existing schools to expand, in a phased and careful manner, in order to meet the demand that exists among parents.

### Academic Selection

18. The Northern Ireland Executive should, without delay, introduce the necessary legislation to prevent schools from selecting children on the basis of academic ability and require schools to develop admissions criteria that are truly inclusive and egalitarian in nature.
19. The Department of Education, through the area-based planning process should consider how best to plan for sustainable post-primary schools with all-ability intakes. In doing this, the Department should have regard for parental demand in each local area for schools with a different religious, philosophical or cultural ethos and make every effort to ensure diversity of provision to meet this demand where it is feasible.
20. The Department of Education should initiate a fundamental review of the use of selection *within* schools with all-ability intakes to explore the benefits and limitations of different models of banding and streaming. The review should be tasked with making recommendations regarding how best to take forward selection within schools so that all children and young people reach their full potential.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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'Building a strong and shared community' is one of the five core priorities of the Northern Ireland Executive in its Programme for Government 2011 – 2015. Within this, the Executive sees the promotion of 'shared education', with its emphasis on schools collaborating across sectors to provide opportunities for children and young people from different backgrounds to learn together, as one of the key drivers for achieving this.

In this regard, the Executive has made three key commitments in its Programme for Government.<sup>1</sup> The first of these has been to establish a Ministerial Advisory Group to 'explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education.' This current report presents the findings and recommendations arising from the work of that Group. The intention is that this report will inform the development of the government's strategy that will seek to achieve the other two key commitments in the Programme for Government that are to:

- Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015; and
- Substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.

## 1.1 Terms of reference

The specific terms of reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group, as set by the Minister, are as follows:

1. The Group is asked to consider, in the context of overall education policy, the aim of which is to improve educational outcomes for learners, the advancement of shared education,

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<sup>1</sup> The Programme for Government contains a fourth commitment to 'Significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly Shared Education campus as a key regeneration project'. This is a specific commitment however that is operating in parallel to the three commitments referred to here.

and to submit advice to the Minister for Education by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013 (later extended until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013).

2. In developing advice, the Group is asked to take account of:
  - Evidence on the preferences of learners and parents in relation to shared education;
  - Evidence of the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches, and of best practice, locally and internationally;
  - Any barriers to the advancement of shared education;
  - How the advancement of shared education might address issues such as ethos and identity.
  
3. The Group is asked to adopt the following definitions:

‘Education’ includes pre-school education; early years services; primary schools (including nursery schools); post-primary schools; special education provision; and youth services.

‘Shared education’ means the organisation and delivery of education so that it:

  - Meets the needs of, and provides for the education together of, learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status;
  - Involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements;
  - Delivers educational benefits to learners, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

## 1.2 Ethno-religious divisions

One of the key drivers for this emphasis on shared education is undoubtedly the need to reduce divisions between the two majority communities in Northern Ireland – Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists – and to promote respect for diversity and enhance good relations.

The immediate backdrop to these divisions is the 25 years of armed conflict in the region that has been euphemistically referred to as 'The Troubles' (1969-1994). Since the outbreak of this violence, over 3,600 people lost their lives and a further 40,000 were injured (Morrissey and Smyth, 2002). Moreover, the conflict has led to significant population shifts as families, and at times whole communities, felt forced to move for safety.

It has been estimated for example that during the first few years of the violence (1969-1972) between 8,000 and 15,000 families were forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere (Smyth, 1998: 15). Moreover, there was also what Boal (1999) referred to as a 'ratchet effect' whereby intense periods of violence tended to significantly increase levels of segregation that would then never return to their previous levels during later times of relative peace.

Whilst the region is now emerging out of the conflict, with devolved government restored and politicians from across the political divide beginning to work together, the legacy of the violence remains. Analysis of the 2011 Census indicates, for example, that nearly half of all wards in Northern Ireland (47%) have a population that is over two thirds Catholic or Protestant. Moreover, the vast majority of children and young people (92.6%) attend either Catholic maintained schools or schools that are controlled or voluntary and that are more likely to be attended by Protestant children and young people.

The continuing impact of these divisions on children and young people has been revealed through a range of studies over the years (for overviews of the early research see: Cairns, 1987; Gough *et al.*, 1992; Cairns and Cairns, 1995).

There is strong evidence, for example, that by the age of three young children are already beginning to demonstrate a preference for the cultural events and symbols associated with their own community compared to those associated with other communities. Moreover, it is estimated that by the age of six, around a third of children already see themselves as belonging to one community and think in terms of 'us' and 'them'. At that same age, one in six children were found to make prejudiced, sectarian comments without prompting (Connolly *et al.*, 2002).

Similar findings were revealed a few years ago in another large-scale survey, commissioned by the BBC, of a random sample of 10-year-old children from across Northern Ireland (see Connolly *et al.*, 2007). All of the children surveyed were born in the year that the second IRA ceasefire was announced. The survey therefore gave a unique insight into how children are faring growing up in the current period of relative peace.

The survey found that the segregation experienced by Catholic and Protestant children extended far beyond the fact that they tended to live in different areas and attend different schools. A clear tendency was also evident for Protestant and Catholic children to be divided in terms of their access to and experiences of a range of social, cultural and political activities as well. For example, it was found that the two groups of children tended to: visit different places locally; go on holiday to different destinations; play different sports; and be exposed at home to different newspapers.

Not surprisingly, such experiences led to a significant proportion of children by the age of 10 already developing a strong sense of national identity, with Catholic children tending to regard themselves as Irish and Protestant children as British. Moreover, many children were found to demonstrate a relatively strong attachment to their own community; evident for example in their tendency to prefer friends from their own community background and also wanting to engage in sports and cultural activities associated with their own community.

At this age, the main impact on attitudes was thus found in relation to children tending to prefer to be with those of their own community

(known as exhibiting an 'in-group preference'). While there was evidence from the survey of children exhibiting negative attitudes towards those from the other community (known as 'out-group prejudice') this was much less prevalent and inconsistent.

As for young people, the most recent evidence from the Young Life and Times Survey of 2011 found that there is a generally positive view of how Northern Ireland is changing with nearly two thirds of respondents (64%) believing that relations between Protestants and Catholics had got better over the last five years. However, over three quarters (78%) of the same young people felt that religion will always make a difference to the way people feel about one another in Northern Ireland and over one in five (22%) said they would prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of their own religion rather than in a mixed area.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.3 Other divisions and inequalities**

While the main impetus for advancing shared education is the need to address the divisions that remain in Northern Ireland along ethno-religious lines, there are other fundamental divisions and inequalities in education that also need to be addressed. This has been recognised in the above Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group where the definition of shared education includes the needs of children and young people from all Section 75 groups and different socio-economic backgrounds.

The figures in relation to socio-economic background are stark. For those children and young people entitled to free school meals, only 32% leave school having achieved the basic standard of five GCSEs Grades A\*-C, including English and maths. This compares to 65% of all other school leavers. Moreover, this achievement gap in relation to socio-economic background is wider in Northern Ireland compared to England. For example, while the odds of young people entitled to free schools meals in England failing to achieve this basic standard at GCSE are three times higher compared to others, this figure rises to being four times higher in Northern Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: [http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2011/Community\\_Relations/](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2011/Community_Relations/)

<sup>3</sup> See Section 4.6.1 (Table 6) for more details on these statistics.

One of the key reasons for this wider achievement gap in Northern Ireland is the current selective system. For example, the odds of young people entitled to free school meals securing a place at a grammar school are nearly five times lower than those for others. Moreover, and based on the latest figures for 2012, when comparing like-with-like, the odds of a young person achieving the basic standard at 16 of five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C, including English and maths, are over three and a half times higher if they attend a grammar school compared to a secondary school.<sup>4</sup>

The current system of grammar and secondary schools therefore not only increases the divisions between young people from different socio-economic background and further inhibits the opportunities for them to learn together but it also exacerbates the relative underachievement of those from low socio-economic backgrounds. This finding is not just specific to Northern Ireland but represents a much wider trend internationally where the evidence from studying a number of different education systems shows a clear link between the use of selection and widening achievement gaps (OECD, 2011).

However, alongside socio-economic background, there are also significant concerns regarding the achievement and experiences of other groups of children and young people in Northern Ireland. For example, within that group of children and young people entitled to free school meals there is a clear achievement gap along ethno-religious lines. The position of Protestant boys entitled to free school meals, for example, is particularly notable with only 19% achieving the basic standard of gaining five or more GCSEs Grades A\*-C that include English and maths compared to 31% of Catholic boys entitled to free school meals. This gap is also evident among girls entitled to free school meals with only 28% of Protestant girls achieving this basic standard at GCSE compared to 41% of Catholic girls (DENI, 2012b).

In addition, the same data for 2011 draw attention to the poor achievement of other groups within the population. For example, of the 136 school leavers who were recorded as being 'in care', just 14 (10%) achieved the basic standard of five good GCSE passes that included

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<sup>4</sup> These figures are also explained in more detail in Section 4.6.1.

English and maths. Similarly, and for the same period, of the 27 school leavers recorded as Irish Traveller, not one achieved this basic standard.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, ongoing concerns have been raised regarding the poor educational experiences and the increased risk of marginalisation and exclusion among a number of other groups of children and young people including: black and minority ethnic children and young people; children and young people with disabilities and those with special educational needs; and children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) (see, for example: Connolly and Keenan, 2000; Mongan, 2003; Stevenson, 2004; McNamee, 2006; Taskforce on Traveller Education, 2010; Boyd, 2011; Winter *et al.*, 2011; Harper *et al.*, 2012).

## 1.4 Core values

These key issues regarding ongoing social divisions and educational inequalities, that are often interconnected, provide the essential backdrop for this present report and the core challenges that any system of shared education needs to prioritise and address.

The Ministerial Advisory Group recognises the complexity and wide-ranging nature of these issues. The Group also recognises the strong and diverse sets of views on these matters from the many different stakeholders that exist. It is with this in mind that the Group has identified three core values to guide its work and to inform the recommendations that it makes to the Minister. These values represent a commitment that the work of the Group is:

- *Outcomes-focused* and concerned with what works best for improving the education of *all* learners;
- *Evidence-informed* and committed to ensuring that any advice given is based upon the best available evidence; and
- *Children's rights-based* and committed to ensuring that the work of the Group and the advice it makes to the Minister

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<sup>5</sup> Additional data on the achievements at GCSE of children in care and Irish Travellers provided by the Department of Education.

are all fully compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other relevant international human rights standards.

As regards being outcomes-focused, this requires a particular concern with identifying what approaches will be most effective in improving educational attainment for all learners as well as in leading to real and measurable increases in a wide range of other social skills and their general levels of wellbeing. Within this, the emphasis on being evidence-informed requires that such approaches need to be subject to a more objective and rational debate that relies upon strong and robust research evidence rather than unsubstantiated claims and anecdotes.

As regards being children's rights-based, the UNCRC and related international standards set out a number of inalienable and fundamental rights that each child is entitled to as a basic minimum. The Convention has been ratified by nearly all countries internationally, including the UK and Ireland. As such, governments, including by extension the Northern Ireland Executive and Department of Education, have a duty to ensure that the rights set out in the UNCRC are realised for all children and young people.

There are many different rights set out in the UNCRC and other human rights standards. These rights can broadly be categorised into those that focus on the rights of children to:

- *Provision* of fundamental services in health, education and social care and thus a basic standard of living;
- *Protection* from neglect, abuse, exploitation and discrimination; and
- *Participation* in relation to having the right to information, freedom of association, privacy and the right to express their opinions and to have their views taken seriously in all matters that affect them.

Such rights are seen as inherently inter-connected and indivisible such that the full realisation of each right depends upon the realisation of the

others. It is therefore not possible to pick and choose which rights within the Convention to support and which to ignore.

In keeping with the indivisibility principle of human rights, the Convention contains four cross cutting guiding principles which are a general requirement for all rights so that they must be considered alongside each of the other articles. The guiding principles are:

- *Non-discrimination* (Article 2) – all Convention rights apply to all children without exception;
- *Best interests* (Article 3) – all actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests;
- *Survival and development* (Article 6) – every child has an inherent right to life and the State has an obligation to ensure their survival and development; and
- *Child's opinion* (Article 12) – the child has right to express their views freely on all matters affect them and to have those views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity

A commonly used framework for applying these various children's rights standards to education is that which identifies three key components in relation to children's rights *to*, *in* and *through* education (see, for example, Tomaševski, 2003; Lundy, 2006; McEvoy and Lundy, 2007). It is this framework that has guided the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group. Much of the detail that follows in relation to these three components has been informed by the recent human rights review of education in Northern Ireland undertaken by Lundy *et al.* (2013).

#### 1.4.1 Children's Rights to Education

Children's rights to education are set out in a number of international standards including Article 28 of the UNCRC that stipulates that governments should make primary and secondary education 'available and accessible to every child' and that this education should aim to develop each 'child's personality, talents and mental and physical

abilities to their fullest potential' (Article 29). Importantly, this right is also underpinned through the Human Rights Act 1998 (First Protocol, Article 2).

This right needs to be read in conjunction with one of the core guiding principles of the UNCRC, Article 2, that makes clear that efforts to realise this and all other rights need to be undertaken 'without discrimination of any kind' and also to 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination'.

In relation to discrimination, Article 2 specifies the duty on governments to ensure that all children can enjoy their rights:

*Irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.*

Given the indivisibility of children's rights, Article 28 should also be read in the light of Article 29. As the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has observed in General Comment No. 1, 'the child's right to education is not only a matter of access ... but also of content' (UN, 2001: Para. 3). The Committee has also clarified that this right to education includes a:

*Right to receive an education of good quality which in turn requires a focus on the quality of the learning environment, of teaching and learning processes and materials, and of learning outputs (UN, 2001: Para. 22).*

For the advancement of shared education in Northern Ireland, these standards therefore require a particular emphasis on the need to address the patterns of inequality outlined earlier in relation to examination performance that can be regarded as 'learning outputs'. The standards also require a specific focus on the experiences of different groups of children and young people within education to ensure that they are not marginalised or disadvantaged in relation to their learning environment and/or the teaching and learning processes they have access to.

### 1.4.2 Children's Rights in Education

Alongside access to education, it is also important to remember that the wider international human rights framework that applies to all people, including children and young people as well. This includes many of the fundamental rights that are now enshrined in UK legislation through the Human Rights Act 1998. As the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made clear in its General Comment No. 1: 'Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates' (UN, 2001: Para 8).

As such, these broader set of rights that apply equally to children and young people are ones that they can therefore expect to be maintained in the context of education. These broader rights that apply for children and young people whilst *in* education can be understood broadly in terms of three themes: participation; safety and welfare; and dignity and respect.

Firstly, and as regards participation, Article 12 of the UNCRC makes clear that children and young people have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and that their views should be 'given due weight' in accordance their age and maturity. Moreover, Article 13 makes clear that children have the right to freedom of expression and that this right includes the 'freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds'.

This right to participation does not simply equate to children and young people's involvement in school decision-making processes but also their right to contribute to government policy-making processes in education. It is for this reason that specific efforts were made by the Ministerial Advisory Group, with the support of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), to seek the views of children and young people on how best to advance shared education.

Secondly, and in relation to safety and welfare, Article 19 of the UNCRC obliges all governments to take all appropriate measures to protect children and young people from all forms of violence, including physical and mental abuse, and in the context of schools this includes all forms of bullying.

Moreover, Article 19(2) makes clear that such a duty to protect children requires governments to be proactive in attempting to prevent potential harm to children and young people. In their General Comment No. 13, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child clarify that schools and other educational institutions have a duty to develop measures that:

Address attitudes, traditions, customs and behavioural practices which condone and promote violence against children. They should encourage open discussion about violence, including the engagement of media and civil society. They should support children's life skills, knowledge and participation and enhance the capacities of caregivers and professionals in contact with children (UN, 2011: Para. 44).

Thirdly, and finally, in relation to children's right to dignity and respect within school, this is covered in a number of ways including: children's rights to freedom of expression under Article 13 of the UNCRC as outlined above; their right to privacy under Article 16; and their right to have their 'cultural identity, language and values' respected under Article 29.

### 1.4.3 Children's Rights through Education

Finally, alongside setting out children's rights *to* and *in* education, there are also a number of international standards that place emphasis on the importance of education for preparing children and young people to contribute fully to wider society. This sense of helping children realise their broader rights *through* education is clearly evident, for example, in relation to Article 29 and the five core aims of education that are, to quote:

- The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the

national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own;

- The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- The development of respect for the natural environment.

This theme is also developed further by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in their General Comment No. 1 when they state that:

Education must also be aimed at ensuring that essential life skills are learnt by every child and that no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life.

Basic skills include not only literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life (UN, 2001: Para. 9).

## 1.5 Summary

This report, and the advice it gives to the Minister on how best to advance shared education, is guided by the UNCRC and other relevant international standards. As such, and at its heart, there is a commitment to ensuring that the vision set out for shared education is capable of meeting the basic human rights that have been agreed internationally for children and young people and that the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department of Education within this is obliged to protect.

As will be seen, this is why there is a particular emphasis placed on the role of shared education in ensuring that *all* children and young people have the opportunity to develop their skills and talents to the fullest and thus a concern with addressing inequalities. It is also why there is a recurring concern with ensuring children and young people's rights within a shared education system are fully protected and that such a system is not just concerned with providing opportunities for children and young people to learn together but also with what they learn when they are together.

Within this broad framework, and reflecting its other two core values, the Ministerial Advisory Group is committed to ensuring that the recommendations it makes will be most effective in improving educational outcomes for all children and young people and that they are based on the best available evidence.

## 2. THE POLICY CONTEXT

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### 2.1 Introduction

This section sets out the broader policy context for education that the Ministerial Advisory Group has been asked to consider in making its recommendations. The section begins by describing the overall structure of the school system before outlining the key commitments set for the Department of Education in the Programme for Government 2011-2015. The section then moves on to outline the Department's Corporate Plan for Education 2012-2015 and sets out how the main existing policy initiatives seek to support this Plan.

### 2.2 Structure of the school system

There are four main types of school management in Northern Ireland:

- *Controlled Schools* – currently managed by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) through Boards of Governors. Primary and secondary school Boards of Governors consist of representatives of Transferors representing three of the four main Protestant Churches, along with representatives of parents, teachers and ELBs. Within this sector there is a small but growing number of controlled integrated schools.
- *Voluntary (maintained) Schools* - managed by Boards of Governors that consist of members nominated by trustees (mainly Roman Catholic or Irish-medium), along with representatives of parents, teachers and ELBs.
- *Voluntary (Non-Maintained) Schools* - voluntary grammar schools, managed by Boards of Governors that consist of persons appointed as provided in each school's scheme of management, along with representatives of parents and

teachers and, in most cases, members appointed by the Department of Education or ELBs.

- *Integrated Schools* - in recent years a number of integrated schools have been established, either as grant-maintained or controlled, at both primary and post-primary levels.

The current distribution of schools and children and young people across the different sectors for the most recent academic year is summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of Schools and Pre-School Education Centres and Enrolments in Northern Ireland by Management Type – 2012/13 PROVISIONAL <sup>(1)</sup>**

	Schools		Children & Young People	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>VOLUNTARY AND PRIVATE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION CENTRES<sup>(2)</sup></b>	<b>390</b>		<b>8,410</b>	
<b>NURSERY SCHOOLS</b>				
Controlled	65	67.0	4,135	69.9
Catholic Maintained	32	33.0	1,776	30.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,910</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>PRIMARY SCHOOLS</b>				
Controlled	374	44.2	77,167	45.9
Catholic Maintained	387	45.7	76,783	45.7
Other Maintained	29	3.4	2,863	1.7
Controlled Integrated	19	2.2	3,503	2.1
Grant Maintained Integrated	23	2.7	5,887	3.5
Grammar School Preparatory Departments	15	1.8	1,907	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>168,110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS</b>				
Controlled Secondary	55	25.6	29,763	20.4
Catholic Maintained Secondary	71	33.0	40,643	27.9
Other Maintained Secondary	1	0.5	541	0.4
Controlled Integrated Secondary	5	2.3	2,612	1.8
Grant Maintained Integrated Secondary	15	7.0	9,501	6.5
Controlled Grammar	17	7.9	15,181	10.4
Voluntary Grammar (Catholic management)	29	13.5	27,170	18.7
Voluntary Grammar (Other management)	22	10.2	20,248	13.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>145,659</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>SPECIAL SCHOOLS</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>4,653</b>	
<b>HOSPITAL SCHOOLS</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>78</b>	
<b>INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS</b>	<b>15</b>		<b>687</b>	
<b>ALL SCHOOLS AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION CENTRES</b>	<b>1,605</b>		<b>333,507</b>	

<sup>(1)</sup> Source: Department of Education. These figures may be subject to revision once the Education and Library Boards' auditing process is completed.

<sup>(2)</sup> Voluntary and private centres funded under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, which began in 1998/99.

## 2.3 Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15

As indicated in the introductory section to this report, the advancement of shared education has to be set in the context of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15. The Programme for Government recognises the particular contribution of shared education to building a strong and shared community. In relation to shared education, the Programme contains three specific commitments and related milestones as detailed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 in Relation to Shared Education<sup>1</sup>**

Commitment	Milestones		
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
71. Establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education	Establish group and produce report with recommendations		
72. Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015	Define the objectives in terms of children participating in shared education programmes	Put in place measures to achieve objectives	Achieve overall commitment objective
73. Substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015	Define the objectives in terms of children sharing school facilities	Put in place measures to achieve objectives	Achieve overall commitment objective

<sup>1</sup>There is a fourth commitment (No. 70) to 'Significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly Shared Education campus as a key regeneration project'. However, this is a specific project that is running in parallel to the three other commitments detailed here.

As can be seen, the establishment of the present Ministerial Advisory Group represents the first of these three commitments. Furthermore, it is the intention that the recommendations contained in this report will subsequently inform the development of a strategy for the promotion of sharing, which will be implemented across the Programme for

Government period. The strategy will, in turn, seek to meet the other two commitments by shaping and driving forward the expansion of shared education programmes and the greater sharing of facilities.

The remaining Department of Education commitments in the Programme for Government are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3: Commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 for the Department of Education (Excluding Shared Education)**

Commitments	Milestones		
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
21. Increase the overall proportion of young people who achieve at least 5 General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) at A*- C or equivalent including GCSEs in Maths and English by the time they leave school	61%	63%	66%
Including: Increase the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve at least 5 GCSEs at A*- C or equivalent including GCSEs in Maths and English	42%	45%	49%
42. Improve literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers, with additional support targeted at underachieving pupils	Develop proposals to significantly improve literacy levels and thereby contribute to addressing multi-generational disadvantage	Implement and monitor programme	Implement and monitor programme

**Table 3 (Continued): Commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 for the Department of Education (Excluding Shared Education)**

Commitments	Commitments		
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
43. Ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it	Identify reasons why parents do not avail of places Commence implementation of the Review of Pre-School Admissions	Based on findings, implement changes to encourage parents to take up places Continue to implement Review of Pre-school Admission	Review progress and take further actions as necessary
70. Significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly Shared Education campus as a key regeneration project	Develop a business case and plan for the new campus	Secure funding and initiate the development programme	Complete procurement process and initiate first phase of construction
76. We will make the Education and Skills Authority operational in 2013	Bring forward for scrutiny and approval by the Assembly, the legislation necessary to establish a single education authority Take forward the organisational, financial and other actions necessary to prepare for the establishment of the ESA, and for winding up the eight existing bodies it will replace	Take forward structural, financial and other actions required for establishing a new non-department public body and for winding up existing Non-Departmental Public Bodies	Single Education Authority established and fully functional

## 2.4 Department of Education's Corporate Plan for Education 2012-15

In October 2012 the Department of Education published its Corporate Plan for Education over the remaining lifetime of the Programme for Government (DENI, 2012e). It sets out the Department's vision that is to see:

Every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development.

In support of this aim, the Plan identifies two overarching goals:

- Raising standards for all; and
- Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality.

These two goals partly reflect a commitment to addressing the achievement gaps and inequalities that currently exist within education as highlighted in the introductory section to this report. However, they also reflect a broader recognition of the fact that there remains a considerable proportion of young people at age 16 who do not achieve the basic standard of five GCSEs Grades A\*-C, including English and maths. This is a concern shared by the Chief Inspector in her recently published report (ETI, 2012a) and also highlighted most recently by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO, 2013: p. 5) that notes that:

By GCSE, two in five fail to achieve the standards [in literacy and numeracy] deemed necessary to progress to sixth form studies at school; further education; training; or step onto the employment ladder.

Alongside these two overarching goals, the Department's Corporate Plan identifies three enabling goals that reflect the priority areas through which the Department will work to achieve its two overarching goals:

- Developing the education workforce;

- Improving the learning environment; and
- Transforming the governance and management of education.

Over recent years, the Department has introduced a suite of policies designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and to address the root causes of underachievement. The key policies are outlined below in turn and presented under the two overarching and three enabling goals listed above.

## **2.5 Raising standards for all**

### **2.5.1 The Northern Ireland Curriculum**

The (revised) Northern Ireland Curriculum, introduced in the 2007/08 academic year, aims to 'empower young person to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their life' with the specific objectives 'to develop the young person as an individual, as a contributor to society, and as a contributor to the economy and the environment' (Education [Northern Ireland] Order, 2006).<sup>6</sup> It is intended to better prepare young people for life and work and has a greater emphasis on skills, as well as knowledge and understanding. The Curriculum comprises:

- The cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT, to be assessed against levels of progression;
- Provision for the development of other skills within the 'Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities' framework, including: Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making, Self Management, Working with Others, Managing Information and Being Creative (Self Management, Working with Others and Problem Solving at Key Stage 4);

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<sup>6</sup> Further information on the Northern Ireland Curriculum is available at: <http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk>

- Religious Education<sup>7</sup>; and
- Areas of learning outlined in Table 4.

The content for each of the contributory subjects within all other areas of learning is outlined as ‘statements of minimum entitlement’.

**Table 4: Areas of Learning Specified in the Northern Ireland Curriculum**

Primary*	Post-Primary
Language & Literacy	Language & Literacy
Mathematics & Numeracy	Mathematics & Numeracy
Personal Development & Mutual Understanding	Learning for Life and Work
The Arts	The Arts
The World Around Us	Environment & Society
	Science & Technology
Physical Education	Physical Education
	Modern Languages

\* The Northern Ireland Curriculum has a Foundation Stage for Years 1 and 2 of primary education to allow for a more appropriate curriculum for the youngest children. The Foundation Stage also aims to promote improved transition to formal schooling from pre-school. The Department does not specify a statutory curriculum for pre-school. However, to encourage best practice in early years settings, non-statutory Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education is provided, which has similar areas of learning to the Foundation Stage curriculum in order to promote progression.

The objectives of the curriculum are associated with a number of ‘key elements’ to be addressed through the curriculum content:

- developing the child as an individual includes the key elements of personal understanding, mutual understanding, personal health, moral character and spiritual awareness;

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the content of Religious Education is determined by the four main churches (Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church) and is set out in the ‘Core Syllabus for RE’, available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/re\\_core\\_syllabus\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/re_core_syllabus_pdf.pdf)

- developing the child as a contributor to society includes the key elements of citizenship, cultural understanding, media awareness and ethical awareness; and
- developing the child as a contributor to the economy and the environment includes the key elements of employability, economic awareness and education for sustainable development.

At Key Stage 3 in particular it is envisaged that these key elements will not only assist teachers in understanding how their subject can contribute to the overall objectives of the NI Curriculum but also assist in facilitating connected learning between subjects. This principle of connected learning in the curriculum is encouraged throughout all Key Stages and supported by CCEA through the development of ‘thematic units’.

At Key Stage 4, the statutory requirements have been reduced to Learning for Life and Work, PE, RE and developing skills and capabilities. This is to provide greater choice and flexibility for young people and will enable them to access the wider range of opportunities schools will have to provide through the Curriculum Entitlement Framework.

The NI Curriculum requires that schools report annually on young people’s attainment in relation to the cross-curricular skills, assessed against levels of progression, and on young people’s progression in relation to the ‘thinking skills and personal capabilities’ framework.

### 2.5.2 Entitlement Framework

The implementation of the Entitlement Framework is intended to ensure that young people have greater opportunity to follow a broad and balanced range of courses that are relevant to their futures and to the future needs of the economy. The Entitlement Framework relates to the post-14 curriculum that aims to provide access for young people to a broad and balanced curriculum, no matter which school they attend or where they live.

From September 2013, all young people will have access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. The specified numbers of courses are being introduced on a phased basis so that, by the 2015/16 school year onwards, all young people will have access to at least 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and 27 at Post-16.

All post-primary schools are members of an Area Learning Community, that encourages cross-school collaboration to maximise the opportunity to meet the needs of young people across the area. The Entitlement Framework will seek to offer courses that are relevant to young people's needs, aptitudes, interests and their future job prospects. It is envisaged that young people can then choose the courses that provide the best progression for them. Progression can be to continue in education, including further and higher education, or by a move into training or employment.

### **2.5.3 Every School a Good School (ESaGS) – a Policy for School Improvement**

ESaGS was published in April 2009 and sets out the Department's approach to raising standards and to tackle the gaps in attainment to 2020 (DENI, 2009a). It sets out the core characteristics of a successful school, that is: child centred provision; high quality teaching and learning; effective leadership; and a school connected to its local community.

The policy aims to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning that children and young people may face. A key element of the policy is that schools, through rigorous self-evaluation, are best placed to identify areas of improvement and to drive changes that can bring about better outcomes for all their children and young people.

#### 2.5.4 Every School a Good School (ESaGS) - Count, Read: Succeed - A Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy

The aim of *Count, Read: Succeed*, published in March 2011, is to raise overall standards in literacy and numeracy and to close gaps in achievement between the highest and lowest achieving children and young people and schools, between the most and least disadvantaged and between girls and boys (DENI, 2011). The strategy sets out long-term targets for raising standards and closing the gaps in achievement, with milestone targets reflected in the Department's PfG commitments.

#### 2.5.5 Learning to Learn - A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning

The Education Minister, John O'Dowd, recently outlined the future direction for early years education and learning in the above Framework (DENI, 2012d), with the overall policy aim being that:

**All children have opportunities to achieve their potential through high quality early years education and learning experiences.**

The policy objectives are to:

- Provide equitable access to high quality early years education and learning services;
- Support personal, social and emotional development, promote positive learning dispositions and enhance language, cognitive and physical development in young children;
- Provide a positive and nurturing early learning experience, as well as a foundation for improved educational attainment and life-long learning;

- Identify and help address barriers to learning, and reduce the risk and impact of social exclusion and the need for later interventions; and
- Encourage and support parents in their role as first and ongoing educators.

The framework details a number of key actions to deliver improved outcomes across the range of early years education and learning services – consultation is currently underway on the need for any further refinement of the actions.

### 2.5.6 Review of Irish Medium Education

Sir George Bain, in the Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education published in December 2006 (Bain Report, 2006), recommended that the Department of Education should develop a comprehensive and coherent policy for Irish-medium education.

The Department accepted the recommendation and initiated a Review to provide the basis for the policy. In 2009 the then Education Minister published the Review of Irish Medium Education, which sets out a range of long term actions to address a number of issues within the Irish Medium sector, including:

- Providing changes to facilitate the expansion of Irish-medium pre-school provision;
- Addressing deficiencies in the accommodation of existing Irish-medium schools;
- Meeting the needs for classroom resources appropriate to teaching through the medium of Irish;
- The provision of more teachers at both primary and post-primary level in the sector, and meeting the need for more subject specialists; and

- Putting in place the building blocks to ensure quality and growth within the sector, not least through the introduction of mechanisms to allow federations between schools.

## **2.6 Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality**

### **2.6.1 Special education needs and inclusion**

The review of the policy on Special Education Needs (SEN) and Inclusion is set out in *'Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'*. The Review made a broad range of high-level proposals covering many of the inter-related areas within the special needs framework. The policy intention for the SEN framework is to ensure that the child is placed firmly at the centre of the processes for identification, assessment, provision and review. Central to the key vision are objectives to:

- Ensure the support needs of a child are met;
- Ensure early intervention;
- Reduce bureaucracy;
- Build the capacity of all schools to address SEN;
- Put a clear focus on learning and outcomes for children and young people with SEN and other barriers to learning; and
- Ensure transparency and accountability for resources and outcomes.

The next stage in the development of the SEN and Inclusion Policy will be to develop a Policy Memorandum for presentation to the Executive Committee for its agreement. Following that, any proposals for change to primary or subordinate legislation will be drafted. The draft legislation will then go before the Assembly, at which point there will be further public consultation.

## 2.6.2 Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomer Pupils

'*Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomer Pupils*' (DENI, 2009b) was published in April 2009 in recognition that, in recent years, schools have experienced a steady growth in the number of newcomer children and young people from various parts of the world who, because of the language barrier, cannot readily access the curriculum. The policy put in place a framework that seeks to ensure that newcomer children and young people feel welcome within and participate fully in the curriculum and life of their school and receive the support they need to fulfill their potential.

There are two key elements of the policy: the establishment of a regional support service across Education and Library Boards, called the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS); and increased funding to schools on a per capita basis via the Common Funding Formula.

## 2.6.3 Supporting Traveller Children and Young People

The Department provides additional funding directly to schools with Traveller children on a per capita basis via the Common Funding Scheme and also allocates additional funding each year to the ELBs to provide educational services to Traveller children, their parents and schools. The additional funding is designed to enable schools to provide the support most appropriate to their Traveller children and young people to ensure they are given equal opportunity to access the full curriculum and participate in an inclusive environment in all aspects of school life, with the aim of improving levels of attendance and achievement. The Department issued updated guidance on the *Education of Children and Young People from the Traveller Community*, including guidance for all schools on the inclusion of the Traveller community in schools, in 2010 (Circular 2010/15<sup>8</sup>).

## 2.6.4 The Extended Schools Programme

The Extended Schools programme aims to improve levels of educational achievement and the longer-term life chances of disadvantaged children

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8 Available at: [http://www.deni.gov.uk/traveller\\_circular\\_-\\_english\\_-\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/traveller_circular_-_english_-_pdf.pdf)

and young people by providing the necessary additional support that can enable those children to reach their full potential.

Since the launch of the programme in May 2006, £60 million of funding has been spent with the intention of enabling schools serving areas of the highest social deprivation to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the normal school day, to help meet the needs of children and young people, their families and local communities. This funding ran until 2011/12 and a further £11.8 million has subsequently been allocated for 2012/13.

The varied activities offered are designed to support learning and promote healthy lifestyles, raise school standards while engaging schools with their local community and connecting people with local services. Activities include breakfast or homework clubs, sport, art, drama, ICT and many other programmes including those that aim to involve parents, families and the wider community in the life of the school.

### 2.6.5 Community Use of Schools

To maximise the community use of school premises already operating through programmes such as Extended Schools and locally made and agreed arrangements, and to build stronger links between schools and the communities they serve, the Department established a Working Group with the remit of exploring how best to increase community access to school facilities outside of normal school hours.

The Working Group, made up of representatives of the key educational stakeholders, produced a Report in 2010 that included a set of recommendations for consideration by both the Department and the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). In advance of the establishment of ESA, further detailed practical guidance to assist schools in enhancing the use of their premises is being taken forward by a Working Group led by the ELBs and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), with input from the other school sectors and other relevant stakeholders.

### 2.6.6 Youth Service

The Department of Education invests in youth work to support and encourage children and young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. Effective youth work helps young people to identify their personal and social development needs and involves them in shaping the services designed to meet those needs. In the youth service, unlike school, participation is voluntary.

The consultation period on the Department's *'Priorities for Youth: Improving Young People's Lives Through Youth Work'* policy document closed in December 2012 and responses are currently being analysed. It is intended that the new policy will better align Youth Work to the key priorities for education and provide a clear sense of purpose and focus on the added value of Youth Work to the holistic education of young people.

### 2.6.7 Community Relations, Equality & Diversity in Education (CRED)

The CRED policy was launched in March 2011 with the aim of contributing to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people, in both formal and non-formal education settings, to develop self-respect and respect for others.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Ensure that learners, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination;
- Educate children and young people to live and participate in the changing world, so that they value and respect difference and engage positively with it, taking account of the ongoing intercommunity divisions arising from conflict and increasing diversity within our society; and

- Equip children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to develop mutual understanding and recognition of, and respect for, difference.

A guidance document and self-evaluation framework for schools and the youth service and a dedicated website have been developed to provide support with the implementation of the policy.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.6.8 Area Based Planning

In September 2011, the Education Minister announced the need to move forward with the implementation of the Sustainable Schools Policy and the process of strategic planning of the schools estate on an area basis, arguing that in the face of an extremely challenging financial landscape over the coming years, progress on reshaping the structure and pattern of education provision could not be delayed.

It is intended that the Area Planning process will result in an effectively planned, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools, of the right type and size, in the right places, which are capable of delivering effectively the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework and of providing adequate access to a range of educational provision appropriate to the needs of the children and young people in an area.

The Minister commissioned the ELBs, working in conjunction with the CCMS and actively engaging with the other school sectors, to undertake the strategic planning of education provision in both primary and post-primary sectors on an area basis. Viability audits have since been carried out to assess the educational, enrolment and financial position of all primary and post-primary schools - the consultation phase for the post-primary plans concluded recently.

## 2.7 Developing the education workforce

The Department recognises the particular professional role of teachers and school leaders in delivering an effective curriculum and raising

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<sup>9</sup> Available at: <http://www.credni.org>

standards and has the following strategic objectives in relation to the education workforce:

- To improve the flexibility of the school workforce, including through the School Workforce Review and the Review of the Negotiating Machinery;
- To promote a more productive working environment across the education sector and effective working relationships between the Department, the Employing Authorities, the Trade Unions and other key stakeholders;
- To deliver an improved focus on professional development;
- Through structured and accredited continuous professional development, to ensure that every teacher has the skills set to support the learning needs of children and young people; and
- To secure increased accountability of the workforce including through more robust processes for identifying and supporting under-performing teachers and principals and through the role of the General Teaching Council for NI.

## **2.8 Improving the learning environment**

### **2.8.1 Review of the Common Funding Scheme**

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements in Northern Ireland, the Board of Governors of every school receives its budget share, either as a delegated budget (in the case of controlled and maintained schools) or a grant (in the case of voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools). The purpose of this budget is to meet the on-going costs of running their school, enabling them to plan and use resources to maximum effect in accordance with their school's needs and priorities.

In June 2012 the Education Minister announced an independent review of the Scheme, chaired by Sir Robert Salisbury, that published its

recommendations in January 2013 (Salisbury, 2013). The review will guide the future implementation of a revised Common Funding Scheme and has sought to identify how best to ensure that the Scheme is fit for purpose, sufficiently targets social needs and is consistent with and supports the Department of Education's policy objectives.

## **2.9 Transforming the governance and management of education**

### **2.9.1 Establishment of the Education and Skills Authority**

The Department of Education views the purpose of education reform as improving outcomes for all young people in education and ensuring equality of access to quality education provision. It also aims to streamline education administration to ensure that much needed resources can be directed to supporting front line services.

The creation of a single Education and Skills Authority is expected to help reduce bureaucracy in the management of the education system by reducing duplication and streamlining management structures. ESA will be the single authority for the administration of education, subsuming the functions, assets and liabilities of the five ELBs, the CCMS, the Staff Commission and the Youth Council. ESA's focus will be on management and service delivery. Its key functions will include raising standards and area planning and it is to be the single authority for those functions.

Legislation to establish ESA is currently being considered by the Northern Ireland Assembly in the form of the Education Bill. The Bill will reach the end of the Committee Stage in the Assembly at the beginning of April 2013 and it is expected that it will receive Royal Assent so that ESA may become operational before the end of the year.



## 3. METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1 Introduction

This section outlines the methodology employed by the Ministerial Advisory Group. In order to meet its Terms of Reference and thus to formulate its own views and advice to the Minister, the Group has engaged in three parallel strands of work: a review of existing research evidence; engagement with key stakeholders; and direct consultation with learners and parents. Details in relation to each of these strands are provided below.

### 3.2 Review of existing research evidence

The review of existing research evidence was based on a thorough search of the existing research literature on the preferences of learners and parents regarding shared education in Northern Ireland and also on the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches and of best practice, locally and internationally.

In order to identify relevant literature, the following databases were searched: Online Research Bank (ORB), ARK<sup>10</sup>; Australian Education Index (AUEI); British Education Index (BREI); Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); Social Science Citation Index and PsycINFO. Key search words and phrases included 'shared education', 'integrated education', 'mixed', 'segregated', 'mainstream', 'inclusion', 'collaboration', 'selective systems', 'grammar schools', 'tracking', 'streaming', 'setting' and 'mixed-ability'.

Searches were also made for systematic reviews within sources such as the Campbell Collaboration<sup>11</sup> and the EPPI-Centre<sup>12</sup> for evidence of reviews that have examined the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches. In addition to these searches, further literature was

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10 <http://www.ark.ac.uk/orb/>

11 [http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/news/\\_campbell\\_systematic\\_reviews.php](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/news/_campbell_systematic_reviews.php)

12 <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=53>

sourced through recommendations from individuals and organisations through the engagement with key stakeholders outlined below.

### **3.3 Engagement with key stakeholders**

Written submissions were invited from interested individuals and organisations using a questionnaire that provided the definition of shared education as set out in the Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group and then seven open-ended questions as follows:

1. What are your views on the best way to advance shared education in Northern Ireland?
2. What do you feel are the barriers to advancing shared education in Northern Ireland?
3. How should the advancement of shared education meet the needs of, and provide for the education together, of learners from all Section 75 categories (outlined above) and all socio-economic backgrounds? Have you any particular experiences or advice to share in relation to any of these groups?
4. How do you think the advancement of shared education might address issues such as ethos and identity? Please comment specifically on how such issues can best address the right of learners to participation, safety and welfare, and dignity and respect in educational settings.
5. What are the implications of advancing shared education for the curriculum and the types of knowledge and skills that are taught in educational settings? Please comment specifically on how the right of learners to develop a broad range of essential life skills should be met.
6. How do you think shared education can be advanced in ways that ensure equality of opportunity and access to education for all learners?

7. Is there any particular research evidence on shared education that you believe should be considered? If so, please provide full references below and, where possible, attach a copy with your submission (preferably in electronic format).

The call for written submissions was made on the Ministerial Advisory Group website on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012 and an email was sent to a range of individuals and organisations. The deadline for submission of responses was 9th November 2012. Individuals and organisations could download the form either in English or Irish, complete it in either language and send it to the Group by email or post.

A total of 111 written submissions were made to the Group by the deadline set. A list of all individuals and organisations that made submissions is provided in Appendix 1. A full copy of the questionnaire, in English and Irish, and copies of all written submissions are available to view on the Ministerial Advisory Group's website at:

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag>

Through the questionnaires, respondents were also asked to indicate whether they would be interested in meeting the Ministerial Advisory Group. A range of 25 organisations was selected by the Group for face-to-face meetings in order to discuss the issue of shared education in more detail. A list of the 25 individuals and organisations met by the Group is also provided in Appendix 1.

The meetings took place between November 2012 and January 2013. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and the transcripts are also available to view on the Ministerial Advisory Group's website. The Group also visited a number of established projects and those that have been held up as examples of good practice locally in January 2013. Details of these visits are also provided in Appendix 1.

### **3.4 Consultations with learners and parents**

Running alongside the process for receiving written and oral submissions, consultations were also carried out with children and young people and also with parents to ensure they were able to express their views on how best to advance shared education, and to have these

views taken into account by the Group. Further details of the methods used to seek the views of children, young people and parents are outlined below.

### 3.4.1 Consultation with children and young people

The Group was supported by the Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) which carried out an extensive series of research surveys and consultations with children and young people. In the first of these, NICCY commissioned a module of questions on sharing education as part of the 2012 Kids' Life and Times (KLT) that is an annual online survey of Primary 7 children in Northern Ireland carried out by ARK.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, NICCY commissioned a module of questions on sharing education as part of the 2012 Young Life and Times (YLT) that is an annual postal survey of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland also carried out by ARK.<sup>14</sup> The results from these two large-scale surveys provided the Group with an overview of the attitudes of children and young people towards sharing education in Northern Ireland.

The findings from the surveys were supplemented by 35 consultation workshops with children and young people from a representative sample of 20 primary and post-primary schools across Northern Ireland. In total, approximately 750 children from Years 5 and 6 in primary schools and Years 11 and 13 in post-primary schools participated in the workshops. The workshops enabled the participants to discuss and articulate their views on shared education in their own words and in more depth than was possible in the quantitative surveys.

NICCY kindly shared with the Ministerial Advisory Group an interim report on the findings of the consultations with children and young people and also the core findings from the two surveys. NICCY has subsequently prepared a full report outlining the findings and making recommendations from all three elements of its consultation exercise

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<sup>13</sup> The findings, and original dataset for further analysis, can be access via the Kids' Life and Times website at: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/klt/>

<sup>14</sup> The findings from this survey and the full dataset available for further analysis will be made available in due course on the Young Life and Times Survey website at: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/>

and this was launched in April 2013 (see NICCY, 2013). A link to the full report is also available on the Ministerial Advisory Group's website.

### 3.4.2 Consultation with parents

The Group commissioned Parenting Northern Ireland (Parenting NI) to seek the views of parents on how best to advance shared education so that these could also be taken into account. A series of focus groups was carried out with 55 parents associated with schools from across Northern Ireland. The focus groups took place in October and November 2012.

The schools were chosen by Parenting NI to ensure a wide geographic range providing experiences from parents living in both rural and urban locations. The focus groups included the parents of children from nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools as well as those with children who are attending alternative educational provision.

The parents came from a wide variety of backgrounds in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and socio-economic status. The full report of the consultation exercise is available to download from the Ministerial Advisory Group's website.



## 4. EXISTING RESEARCH EVIDENCE

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### 4.1 Introduction

This section reviews the existing literature regarding the effectiveness of schools collaborating together in relation to outcomes for learners. A key aim of the review is to identify evidence of the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches and of best practice locally and internationally.

The literature review is based on an examination of relevant research published within the last few years and sourced through a range of local, national and international databases and education citation indexes (see Section 3). In addition to these searches, further literature was sourced through recommendations from individuals and organisations taking part in the Ministerial Advisory Group's consultation process.

### 4.2 International evidence on the effectiveness of school collaborations and contact

Many countries across the world have incorporated sharing and collaboration of one kind or another into their educational systems (Chapman *et al.*, 2009). This section begins with a review of the international literature on inter-school collaborations and is followed by specific examples of shared education initiatives in England and Scotland.

The most recent major review of the national and international literature on inter-school collaborations was carried out in Atkinson *et al.* (2007). While acknowledging that inter-school collaboration takes many forms, ranging from formal to more informal models, Atkinson's review highlights a number of key gains for schools, staff and children and young people resulting from collaboration.

They found that the main gains for schools were threefold: economic advantages such as sharing resources and economies of scale; school

improvement and raised standards with better performance results identified as being related to access to an enhanced curriculum and the development of teacher expertise; and forging relationships with other schools which helps to break down barriers and enables the working together of schools in a mutually beneficial way.

Staff members in collaborating schools were thought to benefit in a range of ways including sharing ideas and good practice as well as having the opportunity to refine their teaching expertise through training and personal development.

The review identified a number of gains for children and young people within collaborating schools. The most widely mentioned academic benefits included the opportunity to experience an enhanced educational experience; for example a better choice of subjects, access to specialist teaching and improved attainment. Beyond that, children and young people were believed to have gained socially through interacting with those from other, sometimes culturally and religiously different, schools. An important gain for primary school children whose schools were working collaboratively with secondary schools was an easier transition between the two school systems.

Bell et al. (2006) carried out a systematic review of international evaluation studies looking at the impact of networks between three or more schools on outcomes for children and young people. In total, 19 studies met the criteria for inclusion in the review and a range of outcomes examined the impact on schools, teachers and children and young people. Of the studies that evaluated outcomes for learners, the review found that five studies reported high impact in terms of attainment (including increases in public examination results and increased academic achievement in core subjects), three reported medium impact and five reported low impact, no impact or concluded that it was too early to claim gains in attainment.

Within the UK, a systematic review of the literature on school-level actions to promote community cohesion (including studies in Northern Ireland) was carried out by the EPPI-Centre in 2008. The

review considered outcomes for learners related to school linking and collaboration. Of the 84 studies identified for the review, 44 involved collaborative action between schools including those with populations drawn from different socio-cultural groups.

Looking specifically at outcomes in relation to school collaboration, while noting that the quality of evidence from the review was variable, the authors reported a number of positive outcomes for learners resulting from a range of school collaborations. These included the development of new friendships between children and young people from different schools and the opportunity to meet others from a diverse range of backgrounds. This contact challenged children and young people's preconceptions and stereotypes and increased their knowledge of different cultures and religions. Some of the mediating factors that influenced the outcomes included the duration of the interventions and the availability of support and training for participants (EPPI-Centre, 2008).

Hansson et al. (2013) identified a range of case studies from the international research literature on sharing education. The authors use these case studies to identify 'comparisons, differences and challenges that have been faced by other societies' (2013: p. 59). They also outline shared education models that have been implemented in a number of these societies. Examples include the creation of: joint church schools in England; multi-denominational schools in Ireland; 'two-schools under one roof' in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the establishment of bilingual and desegregated schools in Israel; and desegregated schools in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Of particular relevance are the results of research studies that have examined the impact of some of these models of shared education on learners. For example, according to Hansson *et al.* (2013) survey research in the United States has shown that attendance at desegregated schools had a range of positive outcomes including improved inter-group relations and increased cross-racial friendships, although the results were more mixed in relation to academic outcomes. Evidence from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Israel also suggests that where inter-group

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15 For a fuller discussion of each of these models see Hansson *et al.* (2013).

contact is established within the school context, children and young people are positive about their experiences and report having friends from the 'other' group.

Overall, the experiences of children and young people involved in shared education in countries across the world are generally regarded as having been positive. However, Hansson *et al.* (2013) outline a number of caveats raised by the researchers who carried out these studies, including a lack of longitudinal research to identify the long-term impact of sharing and the need to establish whether the positive effects identified are transferable to situations outside the narrow confines of the educational environment.

#### 4.2.1 Federated schools

While acknowledging that countries such as Australia, the United States of America and Hong Kong have incorporated sharing and collaboration into their educational systems, Chapman *et al.* (2009) argue that it has been England that has shown the most commitment to sharing in education. While there have been a range of policy initiatives over the years in England aimed at encouraging collaborative activities on a relatively informal basis, Chapman points to the introduction of federations as one of the key developments in taking sharing education forward. He argues that federations have allowed governing bodies to change the structure of organisations to facilitate schools to collaborate.

Federation is a system that links two or more schools sharing leadership with the aim of improving the schools for all involved. Several evaluations of federations have been reported in the literature. One of these was an evaluation of federated schools carried out by Ofsted (2011), while Chapman and colleagues (Chapman *et al.*, 2009) examined the impact of federations on educational outcomes by comparing federated with non-federated schools. They also carried out a follow-up study of the schools to monitor progress in 2011 (Chapman *et al.*, 2011).

Chapman *et al.* (2009) reported a range of federations: cross-phase (e.g. between primary and post-primary); performance (low and high performing schools); size (between small schools or small and medium sized schools); mainstreaming (special and mainstream); faith (based on

similar denominations) and academies (e.g. 2 or more academies run by the same sponsor). The 2009 study identified positive outcomes for federated compared to non-federated schools with the strongest positive outcomes for children and young people in performance federations and least impact for those in cross-phase federations. There was no evidence found in the 2009 study of differential impact for gender, socio-economic settings or SEN.

The 2011 follow-up study of the same schools (with some adjustments to take account of school circumstances) reported positive impacts on GCSE results of performance for academy federations (Chapman *et al.*, 2011). However, Chapman suggests that there is a time-lag of between two and four years before federated schools overtake their non-federated counterparts. The study also reported stronger effects on educational outcomes for federations than for less structured collaborations at the post-primary level.

There appeared to be economic benefits in relation to economies of scale and increased efficiency although the authors highlight the need for further research into this aspect of federations. Strong leadership was found to be important to the success of federations (Chapman *et al.*, 2011), something also highlighted by Ofsted (2011) when it carried out an evaluation of 61 schools involved in 29 federations and reported that, of these, 23 involved one principal leading the federation. Ofsted also examined questionnaire returns from the leaders of 111 federations and analysed inspection judgements from 102 of the schools within these federations that had been inspected by Ofsted three years after federation.

Overall, Ofsted reported that the evaluations were positive; children and young people were more confident because of the greater opportunities open to them and a larger circle of friends. There was improved achievement for those with special educational needs and disabilities and, where schools had formed “cross-phase” federations, notably those between primary and secondary schools and infant and junior schools, federation had resulted in stronger academic transition arrangements. Weaker schools were found to have improved when they had been federated with a more successful school but Ofsted found no evidence to

support parents' fears that education in these more successful schools would suffer.

Key to the success of federations was leadership. Common features identified in the best federations included: a clear vision and good communication of the benefits that federation brought to children and young people, driven by the head teacher but shared by others; well-developed strategic plans with success criteria shared with all staff; rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the federation and holding staff to account; well-established procedures for, and a belief in the importance of, developing and coaching leaders at all levels; and continued professional development of staff.

The barriers identified by Ofsted were split into two groups. The first group comprised concerns expressed by staff and parents about how the changing arrangements would affect them and their children. The second group was associated with the logistics of federation, such as financial matters and distance between schools. However, all the federations had managed to overcome these barriers or were in the process of doing so.

#### 4.2.2 Shared campuses

Shared campuses represent a model of collaboration that involves the consolidation of school premises, facilities and services. One region that has successfully implemented the shared campus model is Scotland where, according to Perry (2012), more than 200 schools share campuses. One such model has been implemented in North Lanarkshire where two schools – one Catholic (denominational) and one non-denominational (secular) – share a single site. Each school has its own autonomous teaching areas while sharing facilities such as administration, sports and library amenities.

Despite initial concerns, particularly in relation to school ethos, evaluations of the North Lanarkshire shared campus endorse the model from the perspectives of the Catholic school principal (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2008) and parents (Perry, 2012). O'Sullivan *et al.* (2008) identified eight factors contributing to the success of the shared campus model in North Lanarkshire. These factors included a strong economic rationale with savings of 25% on capital costs identified by the North

Lanarkshire Council, support from the Catholic Church and from parents and the protection of the ethos of the Catholic school. Excellent school leadership was also identified as a contributory factor to the success of the shared campus.

Independent evaluations carried out on behalf of North Lanarkshire Council reported positive outcomes for children (with no indication of conflict over identities), support for the shared campus from parents, and the maintenance of the individual schools' ethos (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2008; Perry, 2012).

In terms of savings, Deloitte (2007) estimated that building a shared campus has been shown to cost 30 percent less than building two separate schools and 10 percent more than building one school. Savings can also be made on property running costs.

#### 4.2.3 Shared Education in relation to SEN – national and international evidence

According to Kalamouka (2007), the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools has been increasing over the past two decades, mostly with the support of teachers and parents. One of the issues to arise from this policy concerns the impact of inclusive schooling on the achievement of the children with SEN and their peers without SEN. Several reviews of studies looking at these issues have been conducted over the past few years.

Kalamouka (2007) carried out a systematic review of studies looking at the impact of placing children and young people with SEN in mainstream schools on outcomes for their peers without SEN. The main aim was to review research evidence to ascertain whether placing children with SEN in mainstream schools affected the academic and social outcomes for children without SEN. In total, 26 studies were included in the review. The key finding was that there appeared to be no adverse effects on the academic and social outcomes for those without SEN who were educated alongside their SEN peers in mainstream schools, with 81% of the outcomes reporting positive or neutral effects. The authors concluded that mainstream schools can embrace inclusivity

without adversely affecting the achievements of all their children and young people.

Lindsay (2007) reviewed the evidence on the outcomes for SEN children attending mainstream schools based on papers published in eight journals in the field of special education. He identified 14 studies that used a range of methods to assess educational and social outcomes for children with SEN. The nature of children's SEN varied greatly across studies as did the age of samples which ranged from pre-school to 17 year olds. Lindsay reported that the overall weight of evidence could not 'provide a clear endorsement for the positive effects of inclusion' (2007: p. 16).

Ruijs and Peetsma (2009), cognisant of the limitations of previous reviews, included studies on the academic and social outcomes for children and young people with, *and* those without, SEN in their own systematic review. They found that, in the majority of cases, children and young people with SEN performed better in an inclusive environment than a non-inclusive environment. Furthermore, they reported that studies into the effects of inclusion on the academic achievement of children and young people without SEN mostly found positive or neutral results as did the small number that focused on the social effects of inclusion of children and young people with SEN on those without SEN.

In the most recent review of the international literature based on SEN children and young people in post-primary settings, O'Mara *et al.* (2012) found that inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs into mainstream classes improves their social skills and their relationships with children and young people without special educational needs, but its effects on educational attainment were unclear.

### 4.3 Shared education in Northern Ireland

A range of initiatives and policies relating to school-based contact have been implemented by the Department of Education since the early 1980s. These have included initiatives such as the Cross-Community Contact Scheme (CCCS) which is a voluntary scheme designed to encourage contact between young people of different community backgrounds. The general aim of these is to develop children and young people's awareness of the need to respect and value the views of others (ETI 2009).

However, Gallagher *et al.* (2010) and Hughes (2010), reviewing evidence on the efficacy of existing community relations initiatives in schools, suggest that they may have had limited value.<sup>16</sup> Based on this evidence, the authors contend that this may be, at least partly, due to what Hughes notes as 'a failure of schools to engage in any meaningful way with issues of division and conflict through the curriculum' as part of contact initiatives (Hughes 2010: p. 6).

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an evaluation of community relations funding in educational settings in 2009. Examples of the most and least effective community relations activities provided in the ETI report suggest that good quality, sustained contact is a key element of best practice identified by its evaluation (ETI, 2009).

Research evidence from a range of studies carried out in Northern Ireland over the years offers support for this approach and suggests that limited contact resulting from bringing children together for short periods of time – either in school or elsewhere – has little or no long-term effects on their attitudes (e.g. Trew 1986; McGrellis 2004; Stringer 2010).

Hughes and Donnelly (2012) contend that one possible explanation for the limited effectiveness of short-term community relations initiatives in schools, which is based on inter-group contact theory (Hewstone *et*

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<sup>16</sup> While this section is concerned with reporting the research evidence, it is important to note that the Department of Education also recognized these limitations in relation to existing schemes and that this provided the rationale for its review of provision in this area and, subsequently, the development of its Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy. See: <http://www.credni.org>

*al.* 2005; Hughes *et al.* 2007), is that such encounters fail to encourage the development of close ties between participants. She notes that 'the contact literature makes a clear distinction between superficial and intimate contact in respect of positive outcomes. The latter refers to encounters where individuals have a more positive emotional disposition towards others and trust them enough to "self-disclose", thereby creating an opportunity for perspective-taking and out-group empathy' (Hughes and Donnelly, 2012: p. 191).

Support for the efficacy of longer-term, sustained contact between learners from different religious groups on a range of outcomes has been found by studies using both quantitative and qualitative research methods (e.g. McGlynn *et al.*, 2004; Niens and Cairns, 2005; Hayes *et al.*, 2006; Gallagher *et al.*, 2010; Hughes *et al.*, 2010; Stringer *et al.*, 2009, 2010).

The findings from the majority of these studies suggest that sustained contact between children from different religious backgrounds attending integrated/mixed-religion schools or taking part in sharing education programmes contributes to more positive attitudes towards the 'other' community.

In addition to cross-community contact initiatives, the promotion of cross-community understanding has also been formalised within the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The former curriculum for example made provision for the cross-curricular themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage (Education Reform Order, 1989). The (revised) Northern Ireland Curriculum has strengthened this aspect of the curriculum through specific provision for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (primary) and Local and Global Citizenship (post-primary) and the identification of 'mutual understanding', 'cultural understanding' and 'citizenship' as key elements to be addressed across all learning areas (Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006).

In relation to the specific provision for Local and Global Citizenship at Key Stage Three, an evaluation of its implementation in schools suggests

that while young people report increased learning in relation to issues such as 'community relations', they also indicate superficial engagement with the more contentious aspects of citizenship in a divided society, such as sectarianism and community conflict (University of Ulster, 2010). Further, research conducted by Magill, Smith and Hamber (2009) suggests that young people do not feel that the curriculum in general and the citizenship curriculum in particular, provide them with sufficient opportunities to explore these issues.

#### **4.4 Effectiveness of school collaborations in Northern Ireland**

The following section provides a brief overview of the findings from studies and evaluations which have examined the outcomes for learners participating in shared education in Northern Ireland through the Sharing in Education Programme (SiEP), the Sharing Education Programme (SEP) and integrated schools.

##### **4.4.1 Sharing in Education Programme (SiEP)**

The SiEP was established by the International Fund for Ireland with the aim of providing funding for projects that enable young people to participate in shared education. The programme seeks to break down the barriers arising from the conflict in Northern Ireland by providing a range of opportunities for young people to learn together and to reach the highest possible standards of educational achievement. There are 22 projects in SiEP across a range of settings and they include: SEP; the Fermanagh Trust Shared Education Programme; the Primary Integrating/Enriching Education Project; Change Makers; Spirit of Enniskillen; Sharing Classrooms; and Deepening Learning and the Primary Curriculum Partnership Project (ETI, 2012b).

The ETI was commissioned to carry out an evaluation of 19 of the 22 projects taking part in the SiEP and a report outlining the key findings of the overall programme is available (ETI, 2012b).<sup>17</sup> The projects within the SiEP encompass a broad range of cross-sectoral organisations in the

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<sup>17</sup> According to the ETI (2012b), three programmes within SiEP – SEP, Fermanagh Trust Shared Education Programme and the Primary Integrating/Enriching Education Programme are subject to a separate evaluation.

formal schools sector and beyond, including early years, primary and post-primary schools and initial teacher education.

While the report includes evaluations of the individual SiEP projects, information on the outcomes for learners across the programmes as a whole is provided, and the key findings from this section are reported below. The term 'learner' used in the context of the ETI report includes all participants in a project including children, teachers and parents.

Overall the ETI evaluation indicated that the provision for learners was 'good' or 'better' in the majority of projects. The learners understand the aim of the projects and, the report concludes, there are clear links to the aims of shared education.

Across most of the projects, the evaluation notes that the achievements and standards attained by the learners are good. Right across the age-range, the participants enjoy the projects and participate enthusiastically in them. The projects provide an environment in which they can explore their own attitudes, values and beliefs through their shared education experience.

One of the outcomes for learners identified by the ETI evaluation is that taking part in the shared education projects leads to 'positive and discernible changes in their views' (ETI, 2012b: p.10). Participation in the SiEP enables learners to acquire a good understanding of the social, cultural and political issues facing them and their communities and provides opportunities for discussion about these issues with others taking part in the project.

Beyond this, some participants have been able to transfer their learning into other curriculum areas in their schools or at home and to gain accreditation for their new skills to enable them to progress to a higher level of attainment.

#### **4.4.2 Sharing Education Programme (SEP)**

The SEP was established in 2007 and is funded by the International Fund for Ireland and The Atlantic Philanthropies. A key aim of SEP is to encourage schools to work together to create enhanced educational and

personal development opportunities for everyone involved. According to the SEP website, the programme focuses on the provision of sustained, high-quality curricular activities<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, according to Hughes and Donnelly (2012), because it is offered on a cross-community basis it also has intended reconciliation benefits for children and young people, teachers and parents as well as, in the longer term, the wider community.

Research evidence suggests that sustained contact between children from different religious backgrounds taking part in SEP contributes to more positive attitudes towards the 'other' community (Gallagher *et al.*, 2010; Hughes *et al.*, 2010). Children and young people taking part in SEP were also less anxious and more comfortable with the 'other' community compared to their non-SEP peers.

Gallagher *et al.* (2010) reported that the majority of children and young people participating in SEP believed they had gained new skills and experiences and had become more comfortable with the idea of contact with the 'other' community. However, both Gallagher *et al.* (2010) and Hughes *et al.* (2010) found a small minority of children and young people who were not comfortable with the experience of cross-community contact.

In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that there are particular issues that need to be addressed for children and young people and parents engaging in shared education programmes in areas that continue to experience high degrees of segregation and poor community relations. For example, in their study, Hughes *et al.* (2010) reported some evidence that engagement in shared education activities for those living in areas where there is low positive contact between communities may increase negative attitudes in the short term (see pp. 34-38). However, to date, such findings have not been explored in any further detail.

A number of evaluations of SEP have been carried out in the last few years (see, for example, FGS McClure Watters, 2009; Hughes *et al.*, 2010; Clarke, 2011) using both quantitative and qualitative methods to gauge the educational outcomes for learners and the experiences and attitudes

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18 <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk/about.html>

of teachers in relation to SEP. The findings have generally been positive with teachers believing that the quality of the education experience is much better for their children and young people because of the sharing involved (Knox 2010). Borooah and Knox (2012b) found that teachers report enhanced educational experiences for those participating in SEP as a result of the provision of wide-ranging curricular courses.

#### 4.4.3 Integrated education

Integrated schools offer Catholic and Protestant children, as well as those of other faiths, or none, the opportunity to mix with each other on a daily basis (NICIE, 2012). Since the establishment of Lagan College, the first integrated school in Northern Ireland, and with the injection of government funding, the sector has grown and the latest figures provided by the Department of Education suggest there are 62 formally integrated schools (42 primary and 20 post-primary) educating some 21,503 pupils; constituting around 7% of the school-aged population.

One of the difficulties involved in reviewing research on the potential impact of integrated education on outcomes for learners is that the terms used within the literature vary across studies and include 'integrated', 'formally integrated', 'desegregated' and 'mixed' (Hansson *et al.*, 2013). In particular, the use of the term 'mixed' can be confusing as it is difficult to quantify the numerical basis on which participants are evaluating the religious composition of their schools (Hayes *et al.*, 2007). While this is an important point to note, nonetheless it does enable researchers to differentiate between participants who have had some contact, or no contact, with the 'other' community while at school.

Notwithstanding the inherent difficulty in relation to the terminology used, research carried out over many years in Northern Ireland has examined the effectiveness of intergroup contact at integrated or mixed-religion schools on a range of outcomes for learners. These have included social and political attitudes (Hayes *et al.*, 2006; Hayes *et al.*, 2007; Stringer *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Hughes, 2010), friendship patterns (Niens and Cairns 2005; Schubotz and Robinson, 2006; Stringer *et al.*, 2009; 2010; Hughes, 2010; Hughes and Donnelly, 2012) and national identity (McGlynn *et al.*, 2004; Hayes *et al.*, 2007).

Predicated on inter-group contact theory (Hughes, 2010), findings from the vast majority of these studies suggest that attendance at integrated or mixed-religion schools is associated with more tolerant social and political attitudes when compared to attendance at non-integrated schools.

For example, Hayes *et al.* (2007) reported that adults who had attended formally integrated or mixed-religion schools in Northern Ireland appeared to have less sectarian views in terms of their attitudes towards the 'other' community than those who attended schools with only children and young people of the same religion as themselves.

Children and young people involved in integrated education reported an increase in the number of their cross-community friendships, and comparisons with non-integrated schools showed a greater quantity and quality of out-group friendships in children attending integrated schools (Niens and Cairns, 2005).

A recent study by Hughes (forthcoming), based on 51 post-primary schools, confirmed earlier research findings and reported that young people attending integrated schools showed the highest intergroup contact, the highest intergroup empathy, as well as the most favorable intergroup attitudes.

Hughes also examined the outcomes for young people attending what she called 'super-mixed' schools in which more than 10% of the children and young people were members of the 'other' religious community and for young people in 'mixed' schools which had between 5% and 10% of their children and young people from the 'other' religious community. Hughes reported that, irrespective of school type, children who had intergroup contact in school had more positive responses to the 'other' community than those who had not.

One important caveat that needs to be borne in mind when interpreting these findings on the positive relationship between children and young people's attendance at integrated or mixed schools and their attitudes is that it has not been possible to determine whether there is a direct causal relationship between the two. In other words, the vast majority of the evidence reported above has not been able to demonstrate clearly

that it is specifically because of the child or young person attending an integrated or mixed school that their attitudes are more positive. It could be that the reason why there is a relationship between school attended and attitudes is that integrated or mixed schools tend to attract parents, and thus children and young people, with more positive attitudes in the first place.

Finally, there is little information in the research literature on educational outcomes for those attending integrated schools beyond comparisons of examination results between integrated and other school types in Northern Ireland. At the secondary level, integrated schools are non-selective (DEL, 2008) and, according to Gallagher *et al.* (2003), are inclusive in terms of religion, gender and ability. The available evidence suggests that in GCSE and A-level examinations, young people from integrated schools generally perform as well as those from other non-selective schools (Gallagher *et al.*, 2003; DEL, 2008; DENI, 2012b).

#### 4.4.4 Shared education - economic appraisal

To date, only a small number of studies have carried out an economic appraisal of shared education (Deloitte, 2007; Oxford Economics, 2010; Borooah and Knox 2012a; 2012b; 2012c) and all of them have concluded that a more integrated system could deliver savings when compared to the costs associated with the current system of schools. For example, a report produced by Deloitte (2007) suggested that greater collaboration across the schools sector in Northern Ireland and consolidation of the schools estate could result in savings of between £15.9m and £79.6m.

In a series of three papers looking at the social and economic benefits of sharing education, Borooah and Knox (2012a; 2012b; 2012c) examined the economics of school closures, the financial savings that could potentially accrue from SEP, and the impact of SEP on community relations.

In their first paper Borooah and Knox (2012a) report that school closures would save the government £35m from a £1.126m budget, and that 50,000 school children and young people would be displaced. The authors use three case studies of SEP partnerships to argue that this approach would be no more expensive than the status quo but would

be beneficial in several ways. Children and young people would not be displaced and have to travel further to school and SEP confers both educational and reconciliation benefits as well.

In a further paper, the authors analysed the benefits of increasing opportunities for children and young people to gain additional educational qualifications in the context of what they define as ‘the wage premium of someone who holds that qualification over someone who does not, *holding all the other educational achievements and the control variables constant*’ (Borooah and Knox, 2012b: p. 4). Based on this model, Borooah and Knox calculate substantially increased earnings for young people who lift their qualifications at GCSE level.

They apply this model to four case studies of schools involved in SEP and, while acknowledging the assumptions they are making, they estimate the total net benefit in terms of the annual increase in working life earnings to be in excess of £23 million. They also use qualitative interviews with teachers, parents and children and young people to highlight the reconciliation benefits of participating in SEP.

The third paper in the series (Borooah and Knox, 2012c) looks at data collected from the post-primary sector viability audit, identifying schools where shared education may offer benefits in relation to enhanced educational performance for those such as those entitled to free school meals and those with Special Educational Needs.

#### **4.5 Shared education and special educational needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland**

A recent ETI report provided case study evidence from a range of pilot projects based on collaborations between 24 special and mainstream schools across Northern Ireland (ETI, 2012c). The evidence from the ETI evaluation, based on site visits by inspectors and self-evaluation reports from schools, was overwhelmingly positive. Findings indicated that children and young people and staff in both school sectors benefited ‘positively and lastingly from the experience of learning alongside one another’ (ETI, 2012c: p. 2).

One of the most significant findings was that working collaboratively benefited all learners in terms of raised standards across the special and mainstream sectors. Other key benefits included improved social and personal skills for all learners, children from mainstream schools developing a better understanding of those with SEN and the transmission of special education staff expertise to their mainstream colleagues.

A few concerns were raised by those taking part in some of the pilot projects, for example in relation to timetabling and preparation time, funding and resources, and anxieties and concerns of children, parents and teachers. However, overall, the ETI report confirmed the benefits of collaboration between mainstream and special schools and concluded that this model should be 'encouraged and developed carefully' (ETI, 2012c, p. 4) by the education authorities in Northern Ireland.

## **4.6 Socio-economic background and academic selection**

Finally, and given that the Terms of Reference established for this report include socio-economic background in relation to the definition of shared education, it is important to review the evidence of the relationship between academic selection and possible divisions and inequalities in relation to socio-economic background.

### **4.6.1 Academic selection at age 11 in Northern Ireland**

Within Northern Ireland there is clear evidence of a pattern of differential attendance at grammar and secondary schools in relation to socio-economic background. The most recent data on school enrollments at post-primary level are summarized in Table 5. As can be seen, only 16.6% of young people entitled to free school meals currently attend grammar schools, compared to nearly half (49.2%) of all other young people. As also indicated, this translates into the odds of a child securing a place at grammar school being five times less if they are entitled to free school meals compared to all other children.

**Table 5: Enrolments in Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland, 2012/13, by Entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM) and School Type**

	Those entitled to FSM	Those Not entitled to FSM	Total
Total numbers (and percentages) of young people:			
Grammar Schools	4,607 (16.6%)	57,992 (49.2%)	62,599 (43.0%)
Non-Grammar Schools	23,094 (83.4%)	59,965 (50.8%)	83,059 (57.0%)
Total	27,701 (100.0%)	117,957 (100.0%)	145,658 (100.0%)
Odds of young people attending a grammar school	20 : 100	97 : 100	75 : 100

<sup>1</sup>Source: DENI (2013)

Moreover, these social divisions associated with grammar and secondary school attendance are also likely to exacerbate achievement gaps in relation to socio-economic background. An analysis of school-level attainment data for Northern Ireland for 2011/12, for example, demonstrates that once the differences in intake between schools has been controlled for<sup>19</sup>, the odds of a young person achieving the basic standard at 16 of five or more GCSEs Grades A\*-C, including English and maths, are over three and a half times higher if they attend a grammar school compared to a secondary school (see Appendix 2).

This notion of a 'grammar school effect' has also been confirmed by other studies that have tended to show that young people at grammar schools do better than their equally able peers in secondary schools (Coe *et al.*, 2008). In the case of Northern Ireland, this grammar school effect is likely to be one of the reasons why the achievement gap in relation to socio-economic background is higher in Northern Ireland when compared to England.

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 6, for young people in England who are entitled to free school meals, their odds of achieving

<sup>19</sup> In this analysis, differences in the proportion of young people in schools achieving the basic standard at GCSE were analysed once differences in the percentage of young people entitled to free school meals and also the percentage with special educational needs were controlled for. See Appendix 2 for full details.

the basic standard of five GCSEs Grades A\*-C (including English and maths) are three times lower in comparison with others. However, and in relation to Northern Ireland, the situation is even worse with young people entitled to free school meals being four times less likely to achieve this basic standard compared to others.

**Table 6: GCSE Examination Performance for School Leavers in Northern Ireland and England, 2011**

	Northern Ireland	England
Total number of GCSE examinations sat:	17,354	5,225,288
Proportion of school leavers gaining the following GCSE grades, across all examinations: <sup>1</sup>		
A* Grades	8.9%	7.3%
A*-A Grades	27.9%	22.4%
A*-C Grades	75.6%	69.4%
A*-G Grades	99.0%	99.0%
Proportion of school leavers gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C, or equivalent, including maths and English (2011): <sup>2</sup>		
All young people	59.5%	58.2%
Those entitled to free school meals	31.7%	34.6%
Those not entitled to free school meals	65.1%	62.0%
Achievement gap	33.4%	27.4%
Odds of school leavers gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C, or equivalent, including maths and English (2011): <sup>3</sup>		
Those entitled to free school meals	46 : 100	53 : 100
Those not entitled to free school meals	187 : 100	163 : 100
Odds ratio (in favour of non-FSM)	4.02	3.09

<sup>1</sup>Source: Northern Ireland: <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/facts-and-figures-new/education-statistics/115-curriculum-and-assessment-qualifications-pg/gcse-headline-statistics-2012.htm>; England: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/aug/23/gcse-results-2012-exam-breakdown>

<sup>2</sup>Source: NISRA (2012) and DfE (2012) respectively

<sup>3</sup>For example, for every 46 young person entitled to free school meals in Northern Ireland who achieve this standard at GCSE, there are 100 others who do not. Similarly, in relation to young people in Northern Ireland who are not entitled to free school meals, for every 187 who achieve this standard there are 100 who do not. The odds ratio indicates that the odds of a young person not entitled to free school meals achieving this standard in Northern Ireland is 4.02 times higher than the odds of a young person entitled to free school meals doing the same.

In addition to exacerbating achievement gaps in relation to socio-economic background, research locally has also drawn attention to

the adverse effect that the transfer test has at the upper years of primary school, as the focus on preparing children for the test has the effect of restricting children's right to have access to the full curriculum.

As Gallagher and Smith (2000) reported, there was a clear sense from interviews with primary teachers that the final years of the primary school had become organized around the transfer the procedures. Moreover, primary teachers reported feeling the need to focus on a narrow range of curriculum topics to prepare children for the test. This, in turn, was also reflected in the comments of post-primary teachers who felt that children were transferring to their schools with inadequate cover of a number of curriculum areas and that they had to engage in remedial work to ensure that all children had acquired a common core knowledge.

Evidence for this is also provided in the evaluation by Alexander *et al.* (1998) of the 'Dickson Plan' operating in the Craigavon area whereby primary children automatically transfer to junior high schools at age 11 years and academic selection is delayed until the age of 14. What the evaluation found was that primary school principals felt that the absence of the transfer test resulted in less pressure from parents and allowed them to complete the Key Stage 2 curriculum. These perceptions of the school principals were supported by an analysis of Key Stage 2 assessment data that found that a higher proportion of children in Craigavon primary schools achieved level 4 or above compared with children in Northern Ireland as a whole.

#### 4.6.2 How Northern Ireland Compares Internationally

Whilst the current selective system in Northern Ireland appears to be associated with wider achievements gaps in relation to the performance of young people from differing socio-economic backgrounds, there is no evidence that the selective system is driving up educational standards and performance overall compared to other countries.

For example, the comparisons of GCSE performance between Northern Ireland and England detailed in Table 6 do indicate that young people in Northern Ireland are attaining slightly higher proportions of A\* and A grades than their English counterparts. However, and in relation to the proportions of young people achieving the basic standard of five GCSE

grades A\*-C, including English and maths, the differences are negligible. As can be seen, whilst 58.2% of young people in England achieved this standard in 2011, the figure is only marginally higher at 59.5% for young people in Northern Ireland.

A more robust assessment of Northern Ireland's performance can be gained from the various international benchmarking surveys that are undertaken of academic attainment. One such set of surveys focuses on measuring and comparing academic progress in reading, maths and sciences across countries for children at the age of 10. The figures for the latest comparisons undertaken in 2011 for 65 different countries are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7: International Comparisons of the Academic Achievements of 10-Year-Olds<sup>1</sup>**

	Reading	Mathematics	Science
International rankings (out of 65 countries):			
Northern Ireland	3 <sup>rd</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	27 <sup>th</sup>
England	5 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>
Ireland	8 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	23 <sup>rd</sup>
Mean scores (and standard deviations):			
Northern Ireland	558 (76)	562 (86)	517 (71)
England	552 (82)	542 (89)	529 (82)
Ireland	552 (75)	527 (78)	516 (79)

<sup>1</sup>Source: PIRLS 2011 (Mullis *et al.*, 2012a); TIMSS (Mullis *et al.*, 2012b; Martin *et al.*, 2012)

As can be seen, the performance of Northern Ireland in relation to reading and maths compares very favourably with other countries. More specifically, Northern Ireland is third out of 65 countries in relation to reading levels and sixth in relation to maths. Interestingly, Northern Ireland's performance in science is much lower, being ranked at 27<sup>th</sup>.

Without further research it is not possible to identify definitive reasons for this mixed performance. One plausible reason is that the higher performance levels in English and maths may be due to the pressure that is on children of this age who wish to attend grammar schools to prepare for the transfer test. As the transfer tests currently being used have a limited focus on English and maths then it is quite possible that

this could explain the increased performance of children at this age in the international tests in reading and maths.

However, and as noted earlier, one of the concerns raised regarding the current selective system is the pressure it places on schools to focus on a narrow range of knowledge and skills at the expense of other important areas of the curriculum. Given that science is not covered in the current transfer tests used by grammar schools, then the fact that children's relative performance in science in Northern Ireland is considerably lower than their performance in English and maths is only likely to fuel concerns regarding the distorting effects of the current selective system on the final years of primary education.

Alongside these international comparisons of academic performance at aged 10, comparisons are also made for young people at the age of 15 in reading, maths and science. The most recent data available in this regard is for 2009 and the position of Northern Ireland compared to 63 other countries included in the survey is summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8: International Comparisons of the Academic Achievements of 15-Year-Olds<sup>1</sup>**

	Reading	Mathematics	Science
Mean scores (with standard deviations)			
Northern Ireland	499 (97)	492 (89)	511 (103)
England	495 (95)	493 (87)	515 (99)
All OECD countries	493 (93)	496 (92)	501 (94)
International position of Northern Ireland:			
Countries significantly higher	9	20	10
Countries not significantly different	16	12	12
Countries significantly below	39	32	42
Total	64	64	64

<sup>1</sup>Source: PISA 2009 (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2010)

It can be seen that the relative advantage that children in Northern Ireland appear to have at the end of primary school in reading and maths are lost by the time they are approaching the end of their post-primary schooling. The mean scores for Northern Ireland young people in reading and maths are very similar to the overall average for all OECD

countries, while the mean score is a little higher than the OECD average in science. However, and as can also be seen, the international position of Northern Ireland in relation to all three subject areas is similar and can best be described as being only marginally above average.

There are thus two points to draw out from the data presented above. First, there is no evidence that the current selective system in Northern Ireland bestows any advantage on our young people overall. Rather, and if anything, it would appear to be associated with a drop in our overall performance as young people progress through their post-primary years. Whereas the relative performance of our children at the age of 10 is internationally highly ranked, by the time our young people are coming to the end of their compulsory post-primary education this has fallen back to a position that is no more than mediocre.

Second, while the effects of the selective system do not therefore appear to be associated with any improvements in our performance overall, as compared to other countries, there is evidence that it does tend to exacerbate the relative performance of those from poor backgrounds and thus is associated with increased achievement gaps in relation to socio-economic background.

This latter finding reflects trends in the wider international literature. For example, according to a report produced by the OECD in 2011, analyses of the PISA data suggests that the use of academic selection is unrelated to the average performance of education systems as a whole; a finding also replicated in a separate review of the existing research evidence by Coe *et al.* (2008).

However, what the OECD (2011) did find was that the use of academic selection is clearly associated with greater variation in achievement and a significantly larger impact on outcomes of socio-economic background (OECD, 2011). Furthermore, evidence from PISA suggests that the earlier selection occurs, the greater the impact of socio-economic background on learning outcomes.

In summary, the evidence reported above does tends to indicate that the current selective system may be partly responsible for the slight increase in numbers of young people achieving the highest grades at

GCSE. However, there is no evidence that it contributes to our overall performance, that remains distinctly average, whilst there is evidence that it is exacerbating the relative underachievement of those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

As such, there is a need to consider whether there are other methods for organizing education that can maintain the high achievement of our top performers while also improving our overall performance as a country and significantly reducing the existing achievement gaps. It is for this reason that it is worth considering briefly the evidence that exists on the effects of mixed-ability teaching and also the use of setting and streaming.

#### 4.6.3 Mixed-ability teaching and achievement gaps

Evidence from PISA (OECD, 2009) suggests that, overall, the more that schools group children and young people by ability across all subjects the lower the school systems' overall performance, even after accounting for national income. For example, schools and classrooms in the best performing school system, Finland, are heterogeneous in terms of children and young people's abilities and backgrounds. Further, according to a report produced by the OECD in 2004, research appears to suggest that mixed-ability classes in Finland have greatly advantaged lower-achieving children and young people, while those that are higher-achieving are not greatly affected by changes in the composition of a learning group (OECD, 2004).

According to Ireson *et al.* (2005) several international reviews of research into the effects of ability grouping in schools have produced inconsistent results. However, in support of the findings from the PISA reports outlined above, Ireson *et al.* (2005: p. 444) note that, on balance, 'the evidence indicates that educational systems with the greatest curriculum differentiation, through selective entry to secondary school or to particular courses (as in tracking<sup>20</sup>), tend to produce the widest spread of student attainment'.

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<sup>20</sup> Also referred to as 'streaming'. Tracking or streaming involves organizing children and young people into classes by ability, either for all subjects or for certain subjects.

Ireson and her colleagues looked at the impact of ability grouping on GCSE attainment using a cohort of 6000 young people from mixed secondary comprehensive schools in England. Controlling for prior attainment, social disadvantage, gender and attendance, they found no significant effects of setting in English, mathematics or science. The authors conclude that their research shows that ability grouping does not raise GCSE attainment in the core curriculum subjects (Ireson *et al.*, 2005).

Hattie (2010) reviewed meta-analysis studies into the effects of mixed-ability grouping which summarised more than 300 studies covering a range of schooling cultures, subjects, and educational outcomes. He concluded that streaming had only a very small effect on academic achievement. Although there was some evidence that streaming benefited the most advantaged children and young people in terms of academic achievement, the effect size was small. Gamoran (2010) also notes that most studies of ability grouping have found that high-achieving children and young people tend to perform better when assigned to high-level groups than when taught in mixed-ability settings.

Reviewing the evidence, both Hattie (2010) and Gamoran (2010) contend that where streaming systems are present, achievement tends to diverge and initial differences by social class are reinforced. Gamoran (2010) reports a range of studies from across the world that identify aspects of increasing inequality associated with ability grouping between and within schools. He further notes that, as the presence of minority ethnic groups within countries increases, researchers are reporting that streaming reinforces ethnic inequalities. These findings led Hattie (2010: p. 90) to conclude that tracking or streaming has 'minimal effects on learning outcomes and profound negative equity effects'.

Finally, and in relation to within-class grouping, Hattie (2010) reported findings from three meta-analysis studies of within-class grouping; all three reported overall mean effect sizes in favour of within-class grouping. In general, the studies found slightly larger effect sizes for high ability children and young people than for those of medium and low ability.

In a review of the literature, Belfi *et al.* (2012) considered the impact of ability grouping on children and young people's school wellbeing and academic self-concept. They reported that ability grouping had beneficial effects for strong children and young people's school wellbeing but somewhat detrimental effects for those who were weaker while the reverse was true for academic self-concept.

## **4.7 Conclusions**

Overall the combined evidence from research internationally and locally in Northern Ireland is clear in relation to the benefits of schools collaborating together across sectors in a sustained and meaningful way.

Schools that work together in relation to the sharing of resources, expertise and good practice, and that bring their children together to engage in meaningful educational activities, have been shown to produce clear and measurable improvements in outcomes compared to those that do not.

These benefits are particularly evident when schools with different levels of academic performance work together. In such cases, the evidence suggests that collaborations help to boost attainment in the poorer performing schools while having no adverse effect on their higher performing partners. This is also evident in collaborations between special and mainstream schools that show positive effects on attainment, attitudes and the sharing of expertise between staff.

Similarly, there is overwhelming evidence internationally, and also within the context of Northern Ireland, that when meaningful and sustained opportunities are provided for children and young people from different backgrounds to learn together then this can result in improved attitudes and relationships.

However, the research evidence also clearly suggests that such positive effects rely upon a number of key factors including: strong leadership; sustained and meaningful contact between schools and children and young people; and ongoing training and support for teachers and other staff involved. Also, there is some evidence to suggest that there are particular issues that need to be addressed for children and young

people and for parents engaging in shared education programmes in areas that continue to experience high degrees of segregation and poor community relations.

Finally, the existing system of academic selection at age 11 in Northern Ireland is associated with higher degrees of social division between children and young people from differing socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, the evidence suggests that there is a clear relationship between the degree to which education systems employ academic selection and the size of the achievement gap for young people from differing socio-economic backgrounds.

The evidence on the impact of different forms of banding and streaming within schools seems to be mixed, with some of the largest effects found for within-class groupings. In all such systems, however, the evidence suggests that there is a trade-off between the marginal boosts to attainment for high-achievers and the adverse effects on the wellbeing and academic self-concept of low-achievers.

It is clear from the evidence that while the current system of academic selection in Northern Ireland may be giving a marginal boost to the achievement of the highest performing young people, it is not increasing our overall international position that remains distinctly average. Moreover, there is clear evidence that our current system is associated with larger achievement gaps in relation to socio-economic background than elsewhere.

The challenge therefore is finding an alternative system that is more sophisticated, flexible and responsive to the needs of children and young people than the current system of academic selection at aged 11 and that, as a result, is capable of driving up the overall standards of Northern Ireland compared to other countries whilst also significantly reducing the unacceptable gaps in achievement that currently exist for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

## 5. STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON SHARED EDUCATION

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### 5.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the main and recurrent themes that emerged from the Ministerial Advisory Group's engagement with key stakeholders. As explained in Section 3, the Group invited written submissions and then followed these up with face-to-face meetings and also visits to a number of schools and other educational institutions.

Details of the 111 organisations and individuals who made written submissions are provided in the Appendix along with details of the follow-up meetings and visits. All written submissions and full transcripts of all of the face-to-face meetings are available to view on the Ministerial Advisory Group's website at: [www.qub.ac.uk/mag](http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag)

The key themes to emerge from this engagement with a wide range of stakeholders are summarised below under the six core questions that were set out in the invitation to make written submissions. This is not a comprehensive list of all the issues raised with the Ministerial Advisory Group by stakeholders. Rather, the emphasis in this section is simply to draw out and summarise those arguments that were most frequently made.

### 5.2 What are your views on the best way to advance shared education in Northern Ireland?

A number of key themes emerged through the written submissions, face-to-face meetings and visits made to schools and educational institutions by the Ministerial Advisory Group regarding the best way to advance shared education. These were:

### 5.2.1 Mainstreaming of shared education

One view was that if shared education is to be effectively advanced in Northern Ireland then it needs to be mainstreamed within the education system. This, in turn, requires strong leadership from the Minister and Department of Education and central support from the new Educational and Skills Authority (ESA). Within this, three particular issues were raised:

- The need for all education policies and initiatives to be ‘shared education proofed’ in relation to ensuring that they support and advance shared education;
- The importance of ensuring that the Department of Education takes a more proactive approach to promoting and enabling shared education solutions in relation to the current area-based planning process; and
- The importance of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in encouraging and supporting shared education through the inspection process and through the sharing of good practice.

### 5.2.2 Demonstrating the educational benefits of shared education

For some, part of the emphasis on the need to mainstream shared education reflects the importance of demonstrating its wider educational benefits. In this sense, for shared education to be valued and taken forward by schools it was suggested that schools need to be convinced that this will lead to real and measurable improvements in the quality of education that they provide and in educational outcomes among their children and young people. As such, it was suggested that the core business of shared education should be on such matters as:

- Sharing good practice;
- Staff training and development;
- Enhancing curricular provision;

- More effective use of resources; and
- Improving standards.

### 5.2.3 Strong leadership and a whole-school approach

The successful development of shared education between schools and institutions, was felt to depend on the key role of the principal and senior management team. Not only does the successful implementation of shared education require their strong commitment but it was suggested that it also requires:

- The meaningful engagement of governors and management committees;
- The involvement of parents and the backing of the local community; and
- Broader partnerships with the youth sector, further education sector and voluntary and community organisations.

### 5.2.4 Building collaborative models from the ground upwards

It was felt that there was no 'one model' of shared education and that it would be counterproductive to attempt to develop and promote a particular approach to cross-sector collaboration. Rather, the preference was for schools and educational institutions to have the freedom to develop innovative models from the ground upwards that reflect their particular needs and circumstances.

### 5.2.5 The need for sustainability and incentives

For shared education to bring real educational benefits to participating schools and institutions and thus to lead to improved standards and outcomes for children and young people, it was argued that cross-sector collaboration needs to be meaningful and sustained. However, there are also significant costs involved in this in terms of staff time and resources. Therefore to ensure the sustainability of shared education

initiatives it was felt that there is a clear need to provide financial incentives for schools and other institutions to collaborate.

### 5.2.6 Promoting shared education within initial teacher education

It was felt that shared education needs to begin in initial teacher education. For some, this meant that there was a need to integrate teacher education provision. However, others advocated the need to build upon the existing collaborations between the teacher education colleges and universities to ensure much greater opportunities for trainee teachers to share and learn together.

### 5.2.7 Integrated schools as a model for shared education

Finally, it was suggested by some that integrated education provided the most efficient and effective model for advancing shared education in Northern Ireland. Concerns were raised regarding what was perceived to be a lack of commitment on the part of the Department of Education to fulfill its statutory duty of promoting integrated education. While cross-sector collaboration was regarded as a positive development, there were concerns that this should not be at the expense of promoting integrated education. As such, it was suggested by some that more should be done to make the establishment of new integrated schools easier as well as to remove barriers to existing integrated schools expanding and other types of school transforming to integrated status.

## 5.3 What do you feel are the barriers to advancing shared education in Northern Ireland?

Several key barriers to advancing shared education were identified by stakeholders:

### 5.3.1 Organisational and practical issues

A range of different practical issues were identified that represented difficulties faced by schools and other educational institutions who wished to collaborate. These obstacles included: timetabling issues; travel between schools and the time this takes; safety and transportation issues; school meals provision and capacity; and data handling and

parental consent. Depending on the location of schools, some of these issues were viewed as significant and highlighted the additional costs to schools who wish to engage in shared education activities in terms of staff time and resources.

### 5.3.2 Competition between schools

One particular issue identified as a potential obstacle to collaboration was the current funding formula for schools and how this tended to position schools in competition with one another. For some, the competition that exists between schools for children and young people was seen as being a factor that militates against sharing and collaboration.

### 5.3.3 Existing community divisions

Reference was made, in differing ways, to the existing levels of segregation and community divisions that exist and how this can provide a significant obstacle to collaboration. Some referred to parents resisting cross-community links and the concerns they may have over the safety of their children when visiting other schools. Others mentioned how teachers are likely to have been educated separately and then progressed on to being trained in separate teacher education colleges. This, it was suggested, meant that they were often poorly prepared for the challenges of cross-sector collaboration. For others, there was a sense that the main divisions were more along academic lines, with some (largely grammar) schools and parents being reluctant to participate in shared education initiatives because of the perceived adverse impact this may have on their children.

### 5.3.4 Vested interests

A range of vested interests was identified that was felt to represent significant barriers to advancing shared education. These included: the churches, grammar schools; the integrated movement; and the Irish medium sector. In different ways it was felt that each vested interest was primarily driven by the desire to protect their own sector and thus tended to view cross-sector collaboration with suspicion and as a potential threat.

### 5.3.5 Lack of political will

The final key obstacle to advancing shared education identified was the lack of political will within the Department of Education. Concerns were expressed regarding what was perceived to be the passive role played by the Department. According to this view, there was a lack of clear and strong political leadership from the Minister and decisive action from the Department in relation to advancing shared education. This, in turn, was evident in a number of respects including:

- The lack of any leadership from the Department in promoting shared education options through the current area-based planning process;
- The perceived lack of mechanisms to allow schools to change structures and explore options for partnership and other forms of collaboration; and
- The general lack of information and awareness that was felt to exist regarding what shared education is and advice and guidance from the Department regarding how to embark upon it.

## **5.4 How should the advancement of shared education meet the needs of, and provide for the education together, of learners from all Section 75 categories and all socio-economic backgrounds?**

Responses from stakeholders regarding how shared education might best meet the needs of children and young people from all Section 75 categories and also those from different socio-economic backgrounds were fairly diverse. The three key themes that tended to emerge were as follows:

#### 5.4.1 Shared education as a way of schools supporting each other and sharing expertise

In various ways, attention was drawn to the potential for shared education to provide an important mechanism for schools and other educational institutions to share expertise and good practice in relation to meeting the needs of different groups of children and young people. In particular, it was suggested that local collaborative networks could provide the opportunity to establish support groups comprising teachers and staff from other external organisations to develop a range of interventions at a local level to help support the diverse needs of children and young people. Within this, the need for training was identified and how such local collaborative networks could provide important opportunities to identify training needs and to make arrangements to meet these.

#### 5.4.2 Greater coordination of school development plans and resources

Following on from the first point, it was also suggested that shared education could allow for schools and other educational institutions to collaborate in relation to preparing and implementing their respective development plans. In particular, schools could support one another in relation to screening policies to determine how they impact on learners from all Section 75 categories and also those from different socio-economic backgrounds.

#### 5.4.3 The inclusion of special schools in collaborative networks

Finally, one particular theme raised was the importance of special schools and educational resources centres being involved in shared education networks. It was felt that not only would they bring important expertise but their involvement would also allow for more effective coordination of services and support for children with disabilities and children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

## **5.5 How do you think the advancement of shared education might address issues such as ethos and identity?**

Three key issues emerged from stakeholders regarding how shared education might address issues of ethos and identity.

### **5.5.1 Respecting diversity**

The most common response was the need to respect diversity in relation to ethos and identity. The point was made that the fundamental premise of shared education is that it should threaten no one's ethos or identity. Rather, diversity needs to be recognised and celebrated and also incorporated into daily school life, through cross-sector collaborations, so that it becomes normalized.

Within this, however, the point made earlier regarding the importance of developing relationships organically and avoiding the imposition of particular models of shared learning was stressed. Schools and other educational institutions should therefore have the autonomy to develop their own forms of collaboration that reflect local needs and interests and that are formed in collaboration with parents, teachers and other key stakeholders locally.

### **5.5.2 Recognising common goals**

Whilst the need to recognise and celebrate diversity of ethos and identity was stressed by many, the point was also made that collaboration around common goals, particularly in relation to improving educational standards and outcomes, is important in helping to develop relationships between different schools. Some reported their own experiences of participating in shared education programmes and drew attention to the way that those from different backgrounds were able to learn together because they came to see sharing as a normal means of delivering education. Within this, the importance of beginning early, in preschool and primary school, was stressed.

### 5.5.3 The importance of training for staff and children and young people

The third key issue raised was the importance of high quality training and ongoing support for teachers and other educational staff in relation to issues of inclusion and diversity. The point was made that teachers need to develop the knowledge and skills required to deal with sensitive and difficult issues as they arise. Others drew attention to the need for children and young people to also be prepared before participating in shared education initiatives. Such preparation would also cover issues relating to inclusion and respect for diversity alongside skills related to building relationships and listening.

## 5.6 What are the implications of advancing shared education for the curriculum and the types of knowledge and skills that are taught in educational settings?

Three key themes emerged from the engagement with stakeholders regarding the implications of advancing shared education for the curriculum:

### 5.6.1 The Northern Ireland Curriculum already provides the framework necessary; it just needs to be enacted more fully in schools

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Northern Ireland Curriculum, and especially curriculum areas such as PDMU, Local and Global Citizenship and other aspects of Learning for Life and Work, already provide the necessary framework for preparing children and young people to learn together with those from other backgrounds. However, there was some recognition that these areas could be delivered more effectively in schools and thus the need for further support and guidance for teachers in relation to this.

Some commented on the recent policy initiative from the Department of Education – Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) that has the intention of raising the profile of these subjects

by linking various initiatives and supporting teachers and other educationalists. It was felt that it was too early to assess how effective this might be.

### 5.6.2 Shared education as an enabler

In response to this question a number of stakeholders used the opportunity to stress the potential of shared education not only to ensure that children and young people have access to a wide ranging curriculum but also how children and young people learning together from different backgrounds provided enhanced educational opportunities. Some also stressed the benefits of existing area learning communities and how these could provide the basis for further sharing. In addition, it was also stressed that there were benefits of shared education for enhancing initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities that could, in turn, lead to the sharing of expertise and the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

### 5.6.3 The importance of consulting with children and young people

Finally, attention was drawn to the lack of focus on children and young people's perspectives on the curriculum and how it is delivered. In this respect it was argued that it was critical that the right of learners to have a voice in their own education is respected and that there is a need to work with them to identify and address any issues and concerns they may have before commencing shared education programmes. Some suggested that this could possibly be done through joint school councils.

## 5.7 How do you think shared education can be advanced in ways that ensure equality of opportunity and access to education for all learners?

With regard to this final question, four key themes emerged from the responses of stakeholders:

### 5.7.1 Need to address the divisions created by the selective education system

Attention was drawn to the current system of selection at age 11 and how this was felt to enhance divisions and achievement gaps in relation to socio-economic background. Some felt that shared education could be a mechanism for addressing this with grammar and secondary schools working together. However others called for the abolition of academic selection at 11 altogether.

### 5.7.2 Shared education as mechanism for enhancing educational provision for Section 75 children and young people

It was suggested that shared education could provide a mechanism for retaining local specialist services for those from minority ethnic backgrounds and other Section 75 categories, especially in rural areas. More generally, the importance of training and continuing professional development for teachers and other staff was stressed and the opportunities that shared education provided for shared training were emphasised.

### 5.7.3 The importance of early intervention

The importance of early intervention to support those in most need was stressed. Such intervention should begin in the early years and a number of examples were highlighted including: the effectiveness of early work with Irish Traveller parents and young children; the importance of identifying emotional and behavioural difficulties at an early stage; and the ability to achieve significant improvements in literacy through targeted initiatives in economically deprived areas.

### 5.7.4 Extending equality duties to schools and other educational institutions

Finally, it was argued by some that the statutory duty contained in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to promote equality of opportunity and good relations should be extended directly to schools and other educational institutions. Given the enduring nature of the problems faced by particular groups of children and young people, it was felt that schools and other educational institutions should be

required to produce an equality scheme where they identify and set out their plans for complying with their statutory duties under Section 75.

## 5.8 Conclusions

Overall, a wide range of views were expressed to the Ministerial Advisory Group regarding how best to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. The key views and arguments made most frequently have been summarised above. Given the self-selecting nature of the consultation exercises, no attempt has been made to quantify or rank the popularity of each of the views expressed. Rather the intention in this section has simply been to set out the range of views that exists.

What is clear from the engagement with key stakeholders is that there is widespread support for shared education and thus for the idea of schools and other educational institutions collaborating across sectors. However, it is also important to note that, within this, strong views were expressed by some that integrated education provided the best and most effective and cost efficient model for advancing shared education.

There was also broad agreement regarding the benefits of shared education in relation to improving educational standards and outcomes and also building good relations between different communities and social groups. There also appeared to be a broad agreement regarding some of the core issues that need to be addressed in order to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. These included:

- The importance of mainstreaming shared education and the leadership required from the Department of Education, particularly in the short term in relation to the area-based planning process;
- Recognising that no one model fits all and that cross-sector collaborations need to develop organically; and
- The importance of addressing existing funding models for schools that tend to create competition between schools and also providing incentives to schools and other educational institutions to collaborate.

## 6. PARENTS AND LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON SHARED EDUCATION

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### 6.1 Introduction

This section reviews the existing literature relating to the findings from research carried out in Northern Ireland into parents and learners' perspectives on shared education. As noted in Section 4, one of the difficulties involved in reviewing research into shared education is the terminology used and, in this section, a distinction has been made (where possible) between preferences for integrated, mixed-religion and shared education. The latter term, which describes cross-sector collaborations between schools, has begun to be incorporated into research studies in the last few years.<sup>21</sup>

The section begins with a review of the literature in relation to the perspectives of the general population, parents and learners to shared education. This is followed by the presentation of the results from a consultation with parents on shared education carried out on behalf of the Ministerial Advisory Group by Parenting NI. The views of children and young people were sought by NICCY using two surveys (Kids' Life and Times, KLT and Young Life and Times, YLT) as well as a series of consultation workshops and an overview of these results is also presented (see NICCY, 2013). The final sections consider preferences of parents and learners for integrated schools and preferences for shared education in relation to other Section 75 groups.

### 6.2 Public attitude surveys

Evidence from a range of general public attitude surveys suggests that most people in Northern Ireland support shared education for children of different religions and that this support is growing. For example,

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<sup>21</sup> The term 'shared education' was used in the 'Shared Future' report produced by OFMDFM in 2005 [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/asharedfuturepolicy2005.pdf](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/asharedfuturepolicy2005.pdf)

the percentage of adults responding to the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey saying they would prefer to send their children to a mixed-religion school rose from 55% in 1989 to 69% in 2010.<sup>22</sup>

Data from the 2010 NILT survey also found that 86% of respondents favoured more religious mixing in primary schools and 85% favoured more mixing in post-primary schools<sup>23</sup>. Among 16-year-old respondents to the annual YLT survey, there has also been a rise in the percentage of respondents saying they would prefer to send their children to a mixed religion school – from 53% in 2003 to 64% in 2010.<sup>24</sup>

A recent survey (Integrated Education Fund, 2011) found that 91% of the general population in Northern Ireland supported schools from different religious traditions sharing facilities, partnering or collaborating – although support was highest for sharing education at a minimal level. For example, 95% of respondents supported sharing facilities for one-off projects, 90% supported sharing teachers and facilities at the post-primary level while the figure fell to 81% in support of schools with a mixed enrolment.<sup>25</sup> In addition, 88% of respondents supported integrated schools. The survey also found that support was high for government encouragement of more mixed schooling (81%); a figure that has increased from the 73% reported in the 2001 NILT.<sup>26</sup>

Questions were included in the 2010 NILT survey asking respondents their opinions on a range of ideas about the kind of society Northern Ireland should become and one of the statements related specifically to sharing education: 'The government is actively encouraging schools of different religions to mix with each other by sharing facilities'. Results showed that, on a scale of 1 (definitely has not been achieved) to 10 (definitely has been achieved) 3% of respondents chose '1' and 6% chose

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22 These findings are based on the time-series questions on religious mixing in schools asked in the Life and Times survey carried out by ARK [www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community\\_relations/time\\_series/CRencycontact.htm#table3](http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community_relations/time_series/CRencycontact.htm#table3)

23 NILT [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Community\\_Relations/index.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Community_Relations/index.html)

24 These findings are based on the time-series questions on religious mixing in schools asked in the Young Life and Times survey carried out by ARK [www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community\\_relations/time\\_series/ylt/yltcontact.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community_relations/time_series/ylt/yltcontact.html)

25 Schools with a mixed enrolment were defined in the following way: They do not consciously try to achieve religious balance, and may not acknowledge any cultural diversity within the school.

26 NILT 2001 [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2001/Education/GOVMXSCH.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2001/Education/GOVMXSCH.html)

'10' (the mean score was 6.08). There was no difference in attitudes between respondents who had children under the age of 16 years and those who had not.<sup>27</sup>

### **6.3 Parents and learners' perspectives on shared education**

This section reviews the research literature on the perspectives of parents and learners to shared education using data from large scale quantitative surveys and qualitative research carried out in Northern Ireland.

#### **6.3.1 Parents**

The attitudes of parents to shared education tend to reflect those of the general population outlined above. Evidence from the NILT surveys indicates that the majority of parents with children under the age of 16 years would prefer to send their children to mixed-religion schools.<sup>28</sup>

The results of a survey, carried out on behalf of NICIE (Millward Brown 2008), also reported a high level of support for shared education among parents and grandparents. Almost eight in ten (79%) of the 473 respondents who had children or grandchildren of school age said they would support the school their children or grandchildren attended partnering, sharing facilities or collaborating with other nearby schools regardless of their type or sector.

In a telephone survey of the attitudes of a random sample of 400 parents living in Fermanagh to sharing education (Clarke, 2011), 89% supported schools sharing facilities, 81% supported Catholic Maintained and State Controlled schools sharing a campus and 74% supported children travelling to neighbouring schools to be taught subjects unavailable in their own school. Moreover, 91% of the parents would like to see enhanced opportunities for children to engage in shared opportunities in the Fermanagh area and 88% agreed that shared education would help

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27 ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2010 [computer file]. ARK [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt) [distributor], June 2011

28 ARK, NILT survey datasets [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets)

promote mutual respect and understanding among children of different religious backgrounds.

Whilst three in five parents would favour maintaining the current balance of educational institutions, in the case of threatened schools most parents would prefer the merging of schools, or sharing of a campus, rather than having to close schools and the children and young people having to travel significant distances.

In a deliberative poll carried out in Omagh, Fishkin *et al.* (2007) assessed the attitudes of 127 parents towards shared education before and after they participated in a deliberation event. The majority of parents agreed that children of different religions should be educated together and there was little change before and after the deliberation event. The overall conclusion of the study was that a majority of parents in this sample would support schools collaborating and sharing facilities.

O'Sullivan *et al.* (2008) carried out secondary analysis of the data collected by Fishkin *et al.* (2007) as part of the deliberative poll of parents in Omagh. Their findings indicated that 79% of parents supported schools sharing facilities, 56% supported sharing a campus, 57% supported children travelling to other schools for subjects unavailable in their own school and 57% supported teachers travelling to other schools to give lessons on subjects unavailable there.

### 6.3.2 Learners

Research conducted by Hughes (forthcoming) used a range of qualitative research methods to gauge the opinions of 70 young people on the Sharing Education Programme (SEP) they were involved with. The children and young people came from post-primary schools in urban and rural areas. Those attending schools in rural areas (particularly those from a mixed-religion community) tended to be more enthusiastic about sharing education than their urban peers who, according to Hughes, came from an area characterised by high levels of segregation. Overall, however, almost all children and young people in the urban context reported feeling less anxious about the 'other' group as a consequence of their involvement in SEP.

In contrast to these findings, and surveying a random sample of young people from across Northern Ireland, Schubotz and Devine (2012) reported that, among the 16 year olds taking part in YLT, rural respondents favoured segregation more than urban respondents.

As part of an evaluation conducted by Clarke (2011) on behalf of the Fermanagh Trust, children and young people from post-primary schools taking part in the Fermanagh Shared Education Programme were asked which type of school they thought it was better for young people to attend. The survey indicated that 37% favoured mixed religion schools, 35% weren't sure and 28% chose single religion schools.

Hughes *et al.* (2010) carried out 24 focus groups and a survey of 577 post-primary young people taking part in SEP. The young people, reflecting on their experiences of mixing through SEP, mostly said they enjoyed the opportunities to mix and saw value in it. However, in areas that were more religiously segregated, some SEP children and young people reported feeling intimidated when they visited other schools by those not involved in the SEP classes.

In an evaluation of SEP carried out by FGS McClure Watters in 2007, and reported by Perry (2011), 31% of the children and young people who had participated in the programme said they enjoyed taking part in shared classes, 57% said they had gained new experiences and skills and 41% said they had made new friends with those from a different community background to themselves.

## **6.4 Consultation with parents**

The Ministerial Advisory Group commissioned Parenting NI to seek the views of parents on how best to advance shared education.<sup>29</sup> A series of focus groups was carried out with 55 parents associated with schools from across Northern Ireland. The schools were chosen by Parenting NI to ensure a wide geographic range providing experiences from parents living in both rural and urban locations.

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<sup>29</sup> [www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)

The focus groups included the parents of children from nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools as well as those with children attending alternative educational provision. The parents came from a variety of backgrounds in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and socio-economic status. The key findings from the parent consultations are outlined below and a copy of the full report is available on the Ministerial Advisory Group website.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of parents were in favour of advancing shared education as they felt that it would benefit children and young people by opening up opportunities to enhance learning and to give them a better understanding of children from different backgrounds and capabilities. Some parents felt that shared education is good in theory but that it may be ambitious to expect inclusion for all children, especially for those who have complex physical disabilities. Parental involvement was seen as crucial to ensuring that shared education becomes a reality.

All parents were in favour of making changes to the educational system that learners would experience from an early age as they felt that prejudices can be embedded in children by the time they enter post-primary education. Parents also felt that in order to advance shared education there needs to be strong leadership at different levels, including the Department of Education, and that funding would need to be available particularly in the early stages to 'make things happen'.

Barriers to the advancement of shared education outlined by parents included perceived prejudices in the wider community in relation to disability, racism and sectarianism and the teaching of religion in schools. Some felt that parents themselves may need to be educated to deal with prejudices they may have which can be passed on to their children. The parents also raised concerns in relation to the safety of children and young people travelling to some schools because of their geographic location.

Through the focus groups, parents identified a number of issues regarding the practicalities of advancing shared education and ensuring the safety of all children. They felt that timetabling is often too full to

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30 [www.qub.ac.uk/mag](http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag)

allow children and young people sufficient time to move from one setting to another to avail of subjects and facilities in other settings. Parents felt that transport was a key issue if children need to travel to other settings and queried how this would be supervised.

Finally, there was a degree of cynicism from some of the parents about the reason for the consultation taking place. Reflecting the growing anxieties arising in relation to the area-based planning process, some expressed concerns that one of the key outcomes would be the closure of some schools.

## **6.5 Consultation with children and young people**

The work of the Ministerial Advisory Group was also supported by NICCY that carried out a series of research surveys and consultation workshops with children and young people to ascertain their views on shared education. In the first of these, NICCY commissioned a module on shared education as part of the 2012 KLT (Kids' Life and Times Survey) that is an annual online survey of Primary 7 (P7) children in Northern Ireland carried out by ARK.<sup>31</sup> In addition, NICCY commissioned a module of questions on sharing education as part of the 2012 YLT (Young Life and Times Survey) that is an annual postal survey of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland also carried out by ARK.<sup>32</sup>

The results from the KLT survey are publicly available on the ARK website and the key findings from the module on shared education are outlined below. At the time of preparing this report, the full results from the YLT were not available. However, NICCY was able to provide the preliminary findings from the survey to the Ministerial Advisory Group so that the views of the participants can be included in its report to the Minister. Therefore, only a brief overview of the results from the YLT survey is presented in this section.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [www.ark.ac.uk/klt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/klt)

<sup>32</sup> [www.ark.ac.uk/ylt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt)

<sup>33</sup> For full details see NICCY (2013).

### 6.5.1 KLT Survey

Of the 4,400 P7 children who took part in the 2012 KLT survey, more than half (58%) said they had been involved in shared education, 30% said they had not while 12% said they did not know. Children who said they were involved in sharing education were more open to sharing than those who had not, as were children attending integrated schools.

Some 88% of KLT respondents who had been involved in sharing education had done projects with another school, 79% had shared equipment and 78% had had classes with another school. The vast majority of the children (88%) said they had enjoyed it (50% - mostly enjoyed and 38% sometimes enjoyed it). Three out of five (61%) children who had experienced shared education said they had shared with children who were a different religion to them, 10% said they had not while 29% said they did not know if any of the children from the other school were a different religion to them.

All the children, regardless of whether they had been involved in shared education initiatives or not, were asked whether they thought sharing facilities, classes or projects was a good idea or a bad idea. Overall, the children were more enthusiastic about doing projects with other schools (73%) than either having classes (59%) or sharing equipment with them (59%). Across all three activities, children who said they had been involved in shared education were more positive about sharing than those who had not. Some 5% of all P7 children thought all three activities were a bad idea.

The children were given five things that might be bad about sharing education and asked to choose the one(s) they thought would be bad. While 68% of respondents chose the option 'having to be with children I think are rough or nasty', one in eight (12%) chose 'having to be with children from a different religion'. Children who said they had been involved in sharing education were slightly less likely than their peers who had not to think sharing with children from a different religion would be bad (11% and 15% respectively). Children from integrated schools were least likely to think that having to be with children from a different religion would be a bad thing (6%).

The KLT respondents were asked whether they would mind if those from a different religion were coming to do a project with their class. Just over one third (38%) would mind either 'a lot' (11%) or 'a little' (26%). The figure for children who had shared education was 35% (9% 'a lot') compared with 42% for those who had not experienced shared education (15% 'a lot'). Least likely to mind were children from integrated schools (25% - 5% 'a lot').

Responses to an open-ended question asking the children what they would mind about those from a school that was closing coming to their school tended to focus on the issues of the capacity of the school to incorporate large numbers of new children and young people, characteristics of the children such as being mean, nasty or cheeky, the potential for bullying and, in a small number of cases, the community background of the children.

### 6.5.2 YLT survey

In line with the findings from KLT, the 16 year old respondents to the YLT survey were generally positive about shared education. The majority of the young people taking part in YLT thought doing projects, sharing classes and sharing facilities with other schools was a good idea and most of those who had been involved in sharing said they had enjoyed the experience. Some of the good things identified by the young people included being able to make new friends and having access to subjects they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to study.

Overall, the majority of YLT respondents would not mind sharing with those from different school types or community backgrounds. However, like the P7 respondents to the KLT survey, some of the bad things about sharing identified by the young people taking part in YLT included particular characteristics that those from other schools might have such as being disruptive or annoying and having to travel to get to other schools.

### 6.5.3 Consultation workshops with children and young people

The findings from the surveys were supplemented by 35 consultation workshops with children and young people from a representative

sample of 20 primary and post-primary schools across Northern Ireland. In total, approximately 750 children from Years 5 and 6 in primary schools and Years 11 and 13 in post-primary schools participated in the workshops. The workshops enabled the participants to discuss and articulate their views on shared education in their own words and in more depth than was possible in the quantitative surveys. As with the YLT survey, the full results of the consultation workshops were not available at the time of preparing this report. However, NICCY were able to provide the Ministerial Advisory Group with an interim report summarising the key findings and these are summarised briefly below.

Overall, the views of children and young people taking part in the consultation workshops reflected to a large extent the results reported from the quantitative KLT and YLT surveys. In particular, they support the finding that the majority of children and young people are generally positive about sharing education – although a small minority were not.

Participants from both the primary and post-primary sectors identified a range of benefits of shared education. These included having the opportunity to meet, interact and develop friendships with those from other schools and different backgrounds to themselves. Primary school children enjoyed participating in activities with other schools while those in post-primary school felt their learning was enhanced by the opportunity to study in other schools. Many also welcomed the enhanced equipment or facilities they had access to, and the wider choice of subjects that was open to them, through collaboration with other schools.

Reflecting the responses to the open-ended question in KLT, the potential for bullying was raised as a concern for children from almost all of the primary schools and young people from some of the post-primary schools participating in the consultation workshops. Other concerns, particularly for those in post-primary schools, included only having limited or negative interactions with children and young people from other schools and feeling out of place, sometimes as a result of being in a minority in the collaborating school. An additional issue, for some young people, was the inappropriateness of grammar and non-grammar schools sharing activities and classes. Within this, some negative

attitudes were expressed by young people from the two types of school about each other.

A number of children and young people, mainly from post-primary schools, identified concerns in relation to logistical issues such as timetabling and having to travel to other schools. Similar concerns were identified by many of the parents participating in the Parenting NI consultation and by principals and teachers interviewed by NICCY as part of the workshops with children and young people.

The children and young people taking part in the consultation workshops made a range of suggestions as to how shared education might be advanced. Although there were some differences between the views of primary and post-primary children and young people, there were several key points on which most of the participants agreed and these are outlined below.

Reflecting the views of parents taking part in the Parenting NI consultation, many children and young people believed that shared education should begin at an early age and be open to all children. They suggested that opportunities could be provided for children and young people to meet with each other prior to commencing shared classes and projects so that relationships could be established. Particular subjects and activities were identified which the children and young people felt would lend themselves well to sharing including technology, art, PE, science and music. Finally, workshop participants felt there was a need for children and young people to be consulted and any concerns they might have should be addressed, prior to sharing activities taking place.

## **6.6 Parents and learners' perspectives on integrated schools**

### **6.6.1 Parents' perspectives**

Since the establishment of Lagan College, the first integrated school in Northern Ireland, the integrated sector has grown and, currently, there are 62 formally integrated schools in Northern Ireland with an enrollment of around 7% of the school-aged population (DENI, 2012a).

According to NICIE, two thirds of the integrated schools were founded by parents as planned integrated schools and the remainder through a parental vote for transformation to integrated status suggesting clear support from many parents for integrated education (Belfast Telegraph/NICIE, 2012).<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, many schools in the integrated sector are over-subscribed with more than 500 children turned away each year (Belfast Telegraph/NICIE, 2012) and, in the 2011/12 school year, the largest class sizes were in Grant Maintained Integrated schools, where there was an average class size of 27 compared with 23 for the primary sector as a whole (DENI, 2012a).

The results from research studies into parental attitudes towards integrated schools tend to reflect those of the general population and suggest that there is support for this sector of the educational system among many parents in Northern Ireland.

Early research, carried out on behalf of the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) as part of a wider study on attitudes towards integrated and non-integrated schools by Stringer *et al.* (2000),<sup>35</sup> reported that the majority of parents sampled 'appeared to be in favour of integrated education' (2000: p. 63). A more recent survey, carried out on behalf of NICIE (Millward Brown 2008), found that 43% of the 473 participants who had children or grandchildren of school age said they would prefer them to attend an integrated school.

As part of the deliberative poll of 127 parents carried out by Fishkin *et al.* (2007), parents were asked before and after they took part in the deliberation event whether they would support or oppose increasing the number of formally integrated schools in the Omagh area. The majority of parents supported increasing the number of formally integrated schools in the Omagh area and there was little change before (72%) and after (69%) the deliberation event.

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34 Belfast Telegraph/NICIE

[www.nicie.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Integrated-Education-Supplement.pdf](http://www.nicie.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Integrated-Education-Supplement.pdf)

35 Stringer et al (2000) [www.science.ulster.ac.uk/psyri/sites/psyri/IMG/pdf/educ\\_fund.pdf](http://www.science.ulster.ac.uk/psyri/sites/psyri/IMG/pdf/educ_fund.pdf)

Questions were included in the 2010 NILT survey asking respondents their opinions on a range of ideas about the kind of society Northern Ireland should become and one of the statements related specifically to integrated education – ‘The government is actively encouraging integrated schools’. Results for parents with children under the age of 16 years showed that, on a scale of 1 (definitely has not been achieved) to 10 (definitely has been achieved), 4% of parents chose ‘1’ and 4% chose ‘10’ (the mean score was 5.67). There was no statistically significant difference in attitudes between respondents who had children under the age of 16 years and those who did not.<sup>36</sup>

### 6.6.2 Learners

As part of the Stringer *et al.* (2000)<sup>37</sup> survey on integrated education outlined above, children attending post-primary schools were asked for their views on integrated education. Stringer and colleagues found that children and young people in integrated schools were more supportive of integrated education and less approving of non-integrated schooling than their peers attending non-integrated schools.

Research by Montgomery *et al.* (2003) investigated the attitudes of 400 children attending post-primary integrated schools in Northern Ireland and found that the majority had a positive attitude towards their school and 65% said they would send their own children to an integrated school because mixed-religion education is important for peace. Only 5% said they would not send their children to an integrated school and that they would rather attend a secondary or grammar school themselves.

As part of the same project (Montgomery *et al.*, 2003) McGlynn carried out a survey and focus groups with children and young people who had previously attended two integrated schools. The survey respondents were strongly in favour of an expansion of integrated education. The focus group sample agreed with this, some suggesting that all schools should be integrated. Others were more pragmatic, cognisant of the difficulties involved in bringing about educational change (Montgomery *et al.*, 2003).

36 ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2010 [computer file]. ARK [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt) [distributor], June 2011

37 Stringer et al (2000) [www.science.ulster.ac.uk/psyri/sites/psyri/IMG/pdf/educ\\_fund.pdf](http://www.science.ulster.ac.uk/psyri/sites/psyri/IMG/pdf/educ_fund.pdf)

More recently, Schubotz and Robinson (2006) reported that 85% of 16 year olds responding to the YLT survey who attended formal integrated schools were in favour of mixed-religion schools, compared to 49% of those attending grammar school, and 38% of those who attended secondary schools.

## **6.7 Preferences of other Section 75 groups for shared education**

As part of its remit, the Ministerial Advisory Group was asked to consider how the advancement of shared education could meet the needs, and provide for the education together, of learners from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status. This section reviews the available research evidence on the preference of parents and learners for shared education in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN), Irish Travellers and other Minority Ethnic Groups, and socio-economic status.

### **6.7.1 Special educational needs**

In a general attitudes survey carried out in 2004 (Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey), over half of parents with school-aged children were in favour of children with disabilities attending mainstream schools while an additional 40% had no objection to this (O'Connor *et al.*, 2007).

McConkey *et al.* (2004) carried out a large-scale quantitative postal survey of 1,024 parents of children with a range of SEN to explore their views on sharing education for children with SEN. The children attended mainstream schools, special schools and special units attached to mainstream schools. In addition, 96 of the parents took part in follow-up telephone interviews.

Three quarters (74%) of these parents were in favour of inclusive schooling although support was much higher among those whose children attended mainstream schools (87%) than for parents with children in special schools and units (55%). Parents of SEN children attending mainstream schools believed the advantages included not being made to feel different and being integrated into the school and wider community.

Disadvantages identified were that the schools tend to be very large, being seen as different and the children disliking the attention they drew from having a classroom assistant. Small classes, good support and increased attention were the main benefits identified by the parents of SEN children attending special schools/units while the drawbacks included a lack of contact with children without disabilities, distance to travel and falling behind.

O'Connor *et al.* (2007) reported findings from a qualitative study of parents with children who had SEN. She reported that while parents generally supported the philosophical practice of inclusion, they believed that this may not be appropriate for all children with SEN, particularly those with severe conditions.

Of the 4,400 Primary 7 children taking part in the 2012 KLT survey, the majority (61%) said they would not mind if those with special needs or disabilities were coming to do a project with their class, 8% would mind 'a lot' and 21% would mind 'a little'. Some 10% said they didn't know. Children who said they had been involved in shared education were more likely to 'not mind at all' than those who had not (56% and 48% respectively). Similar results were found by the 2012 YLT survey of 16 year olds.

The children and young people taking part in the NICCY consultation workshops were also generally positive about engaging in shared learning activities with children who had special needs or disabilities. They did, however, raise some concerns including how mainstream schools could accommodate the special needs of these children and whether there might be issues with bullying or teasing by non-SEN children and young people.

Doherty (2012) carried out interviews with eight young deaf people aged between 16 and 23 years to investigate their experiences and opinions of schools for the deaf. All of Doherty's respondents were currently, or had been, educated in a school for deaf children, so it is perhaps unsurprising that most felt that deaf children should be educated separately from other children, mainly because they had different needs to hearing children. The young people said they felt more comfortable

around other deaf people and were concerned that they might be excluded or be subjected to bullying in mainstream schools.

In his study, Ryan (2009) sought the views of children and young people with SEN attending six mainstream and special schools on the places in their school where they felt included and excluded. Across the six schools, similar themes emerged in relation to how children and young people with SEN viewed inclusion and exclusion in their schools. Classrooms were seen as inclusive places by children and young people as well playgrounds and outside spaces. Several children mentioned the toilets and the school lunchroom as being spaces where they felt excluded.

In 2000, a qualitative study of 50 young people aged between 15 and 19 years attending special schools and day centres reported mixed views and experiences among learners who had been in mainstream schools before coming to their special schools (Educable, 2000). While some of them had happy memories of their time in mainstream schools, others had experienced bullying. Of those who preferred attending special schools some mentioned the fact that having people at the school who understand the effect a disability can have was important to them. Disadvantages mentioned included few choices about the subjects that could be studied and low expectations of teachers.

### 6.7.2 Irish Travellers and other minority ethnic groups

Results from research into the attitudes of parents and learners from the Irish Traveller community towards shared education have been mixed. Knipe *et al.* (2005) reported that the majority of the 44 young people from post-primary schools taking part in their research expressed a preference for attending mainstream schools as they believed this gave them opportunities to meet and socialise with a wider circle of friends. In contrast, the Traveller children who took part in focus groups run by Biggart *et al.* (2008), as part of an epidemiological study carried out in the Southern Area of Northern Ireland, had a strong negative sense of belonging at school and expressed a clear preference for separate school provision.

Mixed views were also reported by Hamilton *et al.* (2007) among the 28 parents of Traveller children who took part in their study. Some parents believed that it was important for their children to mix with settled children and said they would not send their children to separate schools even if they were available. In contrast, others felt their children were not treated equally in mainstream classrooms and would prefer separate schooling.

Hamilton reported that most of the parents whose children attended St Mary's Primary School in Belfast, which has only Traveller children enrolled, believed that this was a safer option for their children and lessened the risk of bullying and discrimination they perceived was evident in mainstream schools. Of the 63 children and young people also taking part in Hamilton's research, some were happy in school while others disliked school because of the perceived negative attitudes of the teachers and a lack of friends among the settled children and young people.

Bullying and harassment in mainstream schools were issues mentioned by many of the parents and children participating in the research by Biggart *et al.* (2009), Hamilton *et al.* (2007) and Knipe *et al.* (2005). Similar experiences were reported by minority ethnic groups in earlier research by Connolly and Keenan (2000).

Issues raised by both learners and parents included: a lack of cultural awareness among the settled community; concerns about the loss of children's own cultural identity; and a belief that the curriculum and the education system as a whole was failing to meet the needs of Traveller children (Knipe *et al.*, 2005; Hamilton *et al.*, 2007; Biggart *et al.*, 2009). Once again, these findings reflect issues raised in research carried out in 2000 by Connolly and Keenan that reported that a majority of those interviewed thought that more should be done in schools to teach about different minority ethnic communities and to encourage children to respect and celebrate cultural diversity.

Few studies have specifically assessed the views of other black and minority ethnic (BME) learners or parents specifically in relation to shared education; however, some information on integration within mainstream schools, and perceived barriers to this, is available. At a

general population level, 49% of adults responding to the 2010 NILT survey agreed or strongly agreed that the needs of migrant children put a strain on schools.<sup>38</sup> Parents with children under the age of 16 years (45%) were slightly less likely than those with no children under the age of 16 years (50%) to say they agreed or strongly agreed that the needs of migrant children put a strain on schools.

In their study of 24 children and young people aged between 8 and 18 years from three groups – asylum seekers, refugees and migrants – Geraghty *et al.* (2009) reported that the majority found school a positive experience. However, several had experienced instances of racism in school. The 2011 YLT survey also found that 7% of 16 year olds had experienced racist bullying or harassment in school<sup>39</sup> while 42% of respondents said they had witnessed some kind of racist bullying or harassment in their school.<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting the issues raised by Irish Traveller children and parents, members of the BME groups taking part in the epidemiological study carried out by Biggart *et al.* (2009), noted a lack of cultural awareness among the settled community and raised concerns about the loss of children's own cultural identity or language. The study also showed that European Migrant and Asian Children had a lower sense of belonging at school than White settled Northern Irish children, although the differences were small and not statistically significant.

Niens *et al.* (2012) carried out semi-structured interviews with 26 young people aged between 13 and 18 years from minority belief backgrounds. While relationships with teachers and peers from the majority community within the school were seen as mostly positive, some instances of religious bullying were also mentioned, particularly by children and young people who belonged to visible minority ethnic groups.

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38 NILT [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Minority\\_Ethnic\\_People/MIGWRK9.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Minority_Ethnic_People/MIGWRK9.html)

39 YLT [www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2011/Attitudes\\_to\\_Minority\\_Ethnic\\_Groups/YOURABU1.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2011/Attitudes_to_Minority_Ethnic_Groups/YOURABU1.html)

40 YLT [www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2011/Attitudes\\_to\\_Minority\\_Ethnic\\_Groups/RACEBULL.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2011/Attitudes_to_Minority_Ethnic_Groups/RACEBULL.html)

### 6.7.3 Socio-economic status

There is little information in the research literature concerning preferences for shared education in relation to socio-economic background. One report, produced by DENI (2006) and based on a range of studies carried out in Northern Ireland, included findings related to attitudes towards post-primary education among parents from different social backgrounds. The results suggested that more educationally or socially disadvantaged parents appeared less concerned as to whether their child's post-primary school was co-educational or integrated and more interested in schools offering special needs support and in a local area where the child's friends were likely to be going to school. These parents were also less interested in whether the school had a sixth form, a wide range of subjects or good teaching resources.

Among the 715 children consulted by McConville and McNamee (2009) there was a mixed response to the proposal that a percentage of places at grammar schools should be given to children and young people who are entitled to free school meals. While this proposed criterion was seen as benefiting some children who had been disadvantaged by the transfer test, 46% of respondents disagreed with the idea. The main arguments against this proposal were that children and young people should get into a school based on merit instead of family circumstances, and the stigma that could be attached to entitlement to free school meals.

Similarly, when the 5,192 P7 children taking part in the 2010 KLT survey were asked who they would give preference to if they were the principal of a secondary school with limited places (they had 7 options), just 10% selected 'children whose parents do not have much money' as their first choice. The top choice was 'did well on a transfer test' (39%).<sup>41</sup>

## 6.8 Conclusions

Overall, the findings from this review of the existing research evidence and the consultations with parents and also children and young people tend to reflect those emerging from the engagement of other stakeholders reported in the previous section. As outlined above, there is

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41 KLT [http://www.ark.ac.uk/klt/2010/Transfer\\_Test/KIDSCHL.html](http://www.ark.ac.uk/klt/2010/Transfer_Test/KIDSCHL.html)

clear support for shared education in principle but there are a number of concerns regarding how it will work in practice.

The evidence suggests that the vast majority of parents, children and young people feel that sharing facilities, sharing classes and doing projects with children from other schools is a good idea. Moreover, those that have taken part in shared education programmes have tended to report very positive experiences. They have identified a range of benefits including: being able to mix with those from different backgrounds to themselves; enhancing learning opportunities; and having access to a wider range of activities and subjects than they would otherwise have.

The parents, children and young people also raised a number of common concerns that tended to focus on a range of logistical issues regarding the problems of timetabling and the transportation and supervision of children and young people between schools.

In addition, and through the many focus groups undertaken by NICCY, children and young people raised a number of more specific concerns in relation to their experiences of shared education initiatives. These included: worries regarding being bullied; only having limited or negative interactions with others; and feeling vulnerable and out of place. In addition, some young people expressed concerns regarding the inappropriateness of young people from grammar and non-grammar schools engaging in shared activities and classes.

The children and young people involved in the focus groups made a number of suggestions for how shared education might best be advanced. On some issues, the children and young people had differing views. However, the key points where there was broad agreement were the need to:

- Begin shared education early, especially in primary school;
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to meet prior to beginning shared projects or classes in order to develop relationships;

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- Focus on subjects and activities that involved practical activities and working together, including technology, art, PE, science and music; and
  - Consult children and young people when planning shared activities.



## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 7.1 Introduction

The previous sections have summarised a wide range of evidence gathered as part of the Ministerial Advisory Group's work over the last seven months. This has included a review of existing research evidence locally in Northern Ireland as well as nationally and internationally regarding existing models of shared education and their effects. It has also included a wide range of views gathered through engagements with key stakeholders in education as well as from direct consultations with parents and with children and young people.

In this final section, the Ministerial Advisory Group considers the evidence set out in the previous chapters and uses this to outline its recommendations to the Minister on how best to advance shared education in the region. In this regard, the Group remains committed to its three core values, as set out at the beginning of this report, in terms of being: outcomes focused, evidence informed and children's rights based.

### 7.2 Definitions

In taking into account the wide range of evidence submitted, the Ministerial Advisory Group welcomes and endorses the expanded definition of shared education as set out in the Terms of Reference. From a rights-based perspective, it is imperative that shared education includes consideration of the needs of all Section 75 groups and those from differing socio-economic backgrounds as well as relationships between the two majority ethno-religious traditions in the region. As such, the Group defines shared education as follows:

**Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational**

benefits to all learners, promoting the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

The focus of shared education should encompass early childhood services through to primary and post-primary schools, further education colleges and special education provision and youth services. By 'different sectors', the definition refers to schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements.

By 'collaboration', the Ministerial Advisory Group refers to a range of sustained activities that schools and other educational institutions can be engaged in together locally to achieve the aims set out in the definition. However, these activities must include two key elements:

- Teachers across the schools and/or educational institutions working together, whether that be in relation to training and professional development activities or curriculum planning and the delivery of lessons; and
- Children and young people from across those schools and/or educational institutions actively learning together through face-to-face interaction, whether that is working together on specific projects or through participation in the same classes and/or the same sporting and extra-curricular activities.

Teachers' coming together from different schools for the purposes of professional development does not count, in itself, as an example of 'shared education'. Similarly, schools that bring children and young people together for isolated events, such as a school quiz or Christmas carol singing, also does not count, in itself, as 'shared education'.

### **7.3 Vision, values and key principles**

At the heart of this definition of shared education, and based upon the wealth of existing research evidence locally and internationally, is

a vision of change that sees sustained and meaningful collaboration between schools helping to improve the quality of educational provision and raise standards while also, in encouraging sustained and meaningful contact between those from difference backgrounds, helping to build a greater understanding and respect for diversity and thus contribute to a more open and inclusive society.

It is with this in mind that the Ministerial Advisory Group identify two values that stem from the definition of shared education above and that should be at the heart of any future education system. These values also are in line with the current vision of the Department of Education, the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and key policies, including *Every School a Good School*:

- An ability to recognise and respond to the diverse range of talents and abilities that exist among children and young people to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to reach their full potential; and
- An emphasis on developing the whole child so that they have a strong sense of their own identity and an understanding and respect for others and that they are able to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills to enable them to make a full and positive contribution to building a prosperous, open, diverse and inclusive society.

In relation to operationalizing these two values, the Ministerial Advisory Group have identified seven key principles that it feels need to be at the heart of efforts to advance shared education and that combine to create a blueprint for the way forward. These seven principles are also compliant with, and follow directly from, the UNCRC and other international standards and propose a model of education that:

1. Welcomes and celebrates diversity and respects the right of children and young people to be educated in accordance with their own religious, cultural or philosophical traditions while also ensuring that they develop an understanding and respect for others by having significant and meaningful opportunities to be educated together with those from different backgrounds;

2. Ensures that all children have access to a quality education and enjoy equal opportunities within the education system, and thus has a particular concern with identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people from vulnerable and/or marginalised backgrounds;
3. Is built upon strong links with parents and care-givers, fostered in early childhood and maintained throughout each child's progression through the education system, and respects the role they play in supporting their child's education and development;
4. Provides all children and young people with a broad-based and holistic education whilst also ensuring that this is progressively tailored to meet their individual needs and to help develop their particular strengths and talents to the fullest;
5. Helps children and young people develop a greater awareness of and respect for diversity, in all its forms, and equips them with the knowledge and skills to be able to live in an open, inclusive and confident society;
6. Respects the rights and dignity of all children and young people, ensures that their views and opinions are heard and responded to and promotes their safety and wellbeing; and
7. Acknowledges the central importance of good leadership in schools and the quality of teachers and support staff and thus places a particular emphasis on ensuring high quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities that encourage teachers and educationalists learning and sharing together.

Before setting out its recommendations, there are two key issues that have arisen as recurring themes in the evidence and that the Ministerial Advisory Group feel need to be addressed directly: the role of integrated schools in the advancement of shared education; and the place of the current system of academic selection at age 11 in relation to the Group's vision for shared education.

## **7.4 Integrated education and shared education**

The Ministerial Advisory Group recognises the significant efforts of parents over the last 30 years to develop an integrated education system for their children and the gains they have made in this regard. There now exist 62 integrated schools educating just over 21,500 children and young people that have, as a fundamental goal, the need for Catholic, Protestant and other children to be taught together, under one roof. Moreover, integrated schools have a clear Christian ethos and seek to provide for the different faith-based needs of the Protestant and Catholic children and young people whilst meeting the needs of those of other religious faiths and none.

As reported in the evidence gained from the engagement with key stakeholders, it has been suggested by representatives and members of the integrated sector that integrated schooling represents the most effective and efficient model for shared education and that the promotion of integrated schools should be at the heart of any attempts to advance shared education in Northern Ireland. Moreover, significant concerns have been expressed regarding the perceived failure of the Department of Education to fulfill its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education.

The Ministerial Advisory Group notes these concerns and the fact that while other sectors are to be represented in the new Education and Skills Authority, there are currently no plans in the Education Bill for the integrated sector to have representation. However, the Group does not agree that integrated schools should be viewed and actively promoted as the 'preferred option' in relation to plans to advance shared education.

Parents and children have the right to their religious, cultural and philosophical beliefs being respected. The vision of the Ministerial Advisory Group, as set out above, is therefore predicated on parental choice. Where there is sufficient parental demand, the system should actively encourage the development of a range of schools with differing types of religious and/or philosophical ethos.

For some parents this will mean a preference for an integrated school so that their children can learn in an environment that promotes more than one Christian denomination, while for others it will mean a preference for a particular faith-based school, a secular school and/or one that has a specific cultural ethos, such as an Irish-medium school. The key issue, for the Ministerial Advisory Group, is that while the vision of a plurality of different schools is respected and encouraged, this must be within the context where strong efforts are made to ensure that these different types of school collaborate together in a sustained and meaningful manner.

It is in this respect that the Ministerial Advisory Group views integrated schools as one particular *sector*, rather than as a *model* of shared education. As a distinctive school sector that reflects a particular religious and philosophical ethos, the Department of Education should make every effort to ensure that parental demand for integrated schools is met, where this is feasible, as it should for any other type of school.

However, promoting one particular school sector runs counter to the vision of a diverse and plural system outlined above and is not a model for advancing shared education. By definition, shared education involves schools and other educational institutions of different types and from different sectors collaborating together. Actively promoting one sector over other sectors will not only be divisive but it will not, in itself, lead to the educational benefits that accrue from schools sharing good practice and collaborating together; nor will it necessarily ensure that children and young people from a wider range of backgrounds learn together.

## **7.5 Academic selection at age 11 and shared education**

Within the existing shared education initiatives there are a number of examples of successful collaborations between grammar and non-grammar schools. While this is to be welcomed, it is clear from the evidence that the existing system of academic selection at the age of 11 presents a serious obstacle to fully realising the vision and key principles set out above for a shared education system.

As highlighted clearly in the evidence reviewed above, this obstacle can be seen in relation not only to the fact that the grammar/secondary school divide is exacerbating divisions along socio-economic lines but also that it is enhancing the achievement gap and increasing the relative underachievement of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The consequences of the particular selective system in operation in Northern Ireland therefore not only generates divisions and militates against children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds working together but, equally importantly, it undermines the fundamental rights of all children and young people, under the UNCRC, to access to high quality education without discrimination.

This latter point was noted most recently in the periodic review of the UK by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN, 2008). In its Concluding Observations, the Committee expressed concern regarding the continuing existence of selection at age 11 in Northern Ireland despite its previous concluding observations. The Committee went on to recommend that the government:

take measures to address segregation in Northern Ireland [and] put an end to the two-tier culture in Northern Ireland by abolishing the 11+ transfer test and ensure that all children are included in admission arrangements in post-primary schools (CRC, 2008: Para. 67i-j)

Moreover, and as also outlined earlier, there is the backwash effect that selection has on the upper years of primary school as efforts are focused on preparing children for the transfer test at the expense of adequately covering other areas of the Key Stage 2 curriculum. This type of practice that results in adopting a narrow focus on a restricted set of academic skills and that places an excessive burden on children is something that the UN Committee on the Rights of Children have expressed concerns about in their General Comment No. 1:

It should be emphasised that the type of teaching that is focused primarily on accumulation of knowledge, prompting competition and leading to an excessive burden of work on children, may seriously hamper

the harmonious development of the child to the fullest potential of his or her abilities and talents. (UN, 2001: Para. 12)

Finally, it is worth noting that the maintenance of distinct grammar and secondary schools will continue to impede the most effective rationalisation of the schools estate through the area-based planning process. At the post-primary level, it will ensure that there are a larger number of schools than are needed for each local area. This is not only wasteful but it will leave some schools, largely secondary schools, remaining vulnerable to falling numbers and reduced funding.

In this regard removing academic selection at the age of 11 will enable the development of a smaller number of larger schools that will each have the economies of scale to deliver the entitlement framework while also enabling strong and sustainable collaborative relationships to develop with other schools in their locality.

It is for the reasons above that the view of the Ministerial Advisory Group is that advances in relation to shared education will remain seriously limited while the current system of academic selection at age 11 continues in Northern Ireland. In making this argument, however, the Group is keen to stress two points.

Firstly, the Group is concerned not to impede the progress that has already been made in relation to advancing shared education. As outlined above, there is widespread support for advancing shared education even within the current selective system and also an impressive body of evidence of good practice to build upon in this regard. As such, the lack of a political consensus regarding the future of academic selection should not be an obstacle to making significant progress now regarding implementing the first 16 of the 20 recommendations made below.

Secondly, the Ministerial Advisory Group recognises that academic selection that takes place *within* schools with all-ability intakes, can have an important role to play in relation to ensuring that all children and young people are able to receive a bespoke education that is tailored to their particular skills and talents and thus ensures that they reach their

fullest potential. However, this can best be achieved through a more flexible and sophisticated system of banding and streaming within schools that recognises that each child and young person develops at different rates and is likely to have strengths in certain areas while possibly requiring additional support in others. Also, any such system needs to be developed carefully given that it can still result in negative effects on the wellbeing and academic self-confidence of low achievers.

In this sense, the current system that only offers two educational pathways – grammar or secondary – and that determines which pathway a child will follow based upon one high-stakes and currently unregulated test at the age of 11 is divisive, archaic and not fit for purpose. As such, if the true vision for shared education is to be realised then the current system of academic selection *for* education needs to be replaced with a more sophisticated system of selection *within* education.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

The 20 recommendations set out below provide an overall framework for advancing shared education in Northern Ireland. The recommendations address five core areas: mainstreaming shared education; supporting shared education; schools and other educational institutions; area-based planning and the schools estate; and academic selection.

### **Mainstreaming Shared Education**

The Ministerial Advisory Group regard shared education not as just another educational initiative but as the principle driver for enhancing the quality of education, improving standards and outcomes for children and young people and addressing divisions and promoting a respectful and inclusive society. As such, the need for strong leadership from the Department and for shared education to be mainstreamed and placed at the heart of educational policy and practice is clear.

It is with this in mind that the following three recommendations seek to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate shared education (Recommendation 1) and ensure that there is a central unit within the new Education and Skills Authority with responsibility for driving shared education forward (Recommendation 2).

In addition, there is a need to ensure that the common funding formula for schools and other educational institutions provides clear financial support and incentives to engage in shared education (Recommendation 3).

### Recommendation 1

The Education Bill should be amended to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education and the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to encourage and facilitate shared education as defined in this report. This should include reviewing all existing and proposed policies within education, and providing advice as required, to ensure that all activities seek to encourage and facilitate shared education where appropriate.

### Recommendation 2

ESA should establish a central unit, or identify an existing unit, that should take lead responsibility for encouraging and facilitating shared education. This unit should:

- Develop and drive forward a strategy for advancing shared education that includes setting targets and goals, monitoring shared education activities and producing an annual report on progress being made;
- Establish and maintain a regional structure for supporting schools and other educational institutions engaged in shared education; and
- Commission research and evaluations into shared education and facilitate the sharing and dissemination of good practice.

### Recommendation 3

As part of the proposed revised common funding formula suggested by Sir Robert Salisbury in his independent review for the Department of Education, a 'shared education premium' should be incorporated into

the funding formula for schools and other educational institutions. This premium would recognise the added value of shared education and should be weighted in terms of:

- The number of children and young people that are engaged in shared education activities, as defined in this report; and
- The proportion of school time that children and young people are engaged in such activities.

### Supporting Schools in Shared Education

Alongside the core developments aimed at ensuring the mainstreaming of shared education, there is also a need to develop a comprehensive framework of support for schools and other educational institutions to help them develop and sustain collaborative working.

In this respect, there is a need for the support provided through the inspection process to assess current practice and provide schools and other educational institutions with direct guidance (Recommendation 4). However, and given the vision of shared education being a central driver for enhancing education, there is a need to learn from and share good practice across the region (Recommendation 5) and ensure that a framework for teacher education is established that has collaborative practice at its heart (Recommendation 6).

In addition, there is a need to ensure that high quality training and other materials are available to support schools and other educational institutions in relation to the difficult task of establishing and maintaining collaborations across schools (Recommendation 7) and that the principles of shared education run through the provision of initial teacher education and the provision of accredited courses (Recommendation 8).

#### Recommendation 4

Where schools and other educational institutions are in receipt of a shared education premium, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

should include an explicit review the use of that funding in its inspection reports particularly in relation to:

- The added value of such shared education activities;
- The value for money of the funding provided; and
- The quality and effectiveness of the shared education activities.

### Recommendation 5

The ETI should produce a biennial report that reviews the current range and extent of shared education activities across Northern Ireland, highlights good practice and makes recommendations regarding how these could be extended and enhanced, within the overall context of school improvement.

### Recommendation 6

The Department of Education, in its review of teacher education and continuing professional development, should develop a framework for supporting the early and continuing professional development of teachers that encourages its delivery through shared education and thus via effective collaboration between schools and other educational institutions. It is recommended that such a framework should encourage collaborative networks of schools and other educational institutions identifying their own professional development needs and being devolved appropriate levels of funding through the common funding formula to commission the training, courses and/or other support that they require from the most appropriate providers.

### Recommendation 7

ESA should ensure that all teachers and principals in schools and other educational establishments have access to a range of training courses and resource materials, and ongoing advice and support, to help them develop the particular knowledge and skills associated with effectively

organising and managing shared education activities and classes. This should include a focus on:

- Establishing and organising collaborative activities, projects and classes between schools and other educational establishments;
- Ensuring the meaningful participation of children and young people in the planning and delivery of shared education initiatives (see also Recommendation 11);
- Promoting positive relationships and dealing constructively with any negative incidents and poor interactions between children and young people that may arise;
- Covering sensitive topics and issues which might arise in the context of a diverse group of children and young people; and
- Developing and maintaining meaningful and effective relationships with parents and other care-givers.

### Recommendation 8

The Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the higher education institutions responsible for delivering initial teacher education and professional development courses, should review existing provision to consider appropriate mechanisms for collaboration to ensure that student teachers and teachers returning for professional development can be provided with opportunities to learn together, including in relation to preparation for teaching through shared education.

### Schools and Other Educational Institutions

Against the backdrop of the recommendations above that seek to mainstream shared education and ensure that the necessary support structures are in place at a regional level, there are a number of key

actions that schools and other educational institutions need to take forward directly. These include developing stronger relationships with parents and care-givers (Recommendation 9) and placing a greater emphasis on promoting respect and good relations (Recommendation 10).

Regarding this latter recommendation, it is worth being reminded of the actual text of Article 29 of the UNCRC and how it makes clear that children and young people have an absolute right to an education that is directed to, among other things:

- The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for the civilisations different from his or her own;
- The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

Given the importance of the above and also the concerns that continue to be raised regarding how effectively schools and other educational institutions are meeting their duties with regard to this, it is timely for a full and independent review to be undertaken of existing educational provision in Northern Ireland. It is also important that this review seeks to: learn from existing inspections of the delivery of these areas of the curriculum; consider how schools might best address these themes so that they are relevant to the context of Northern Ireland; and identify what support is needed for teachers in addressing these areas effectively.

In addition to the above, there is also an urgent need to ensure that children and young people's right, under Article 12 of the UNCRC, to be consulted and to participate in decision making regarding matters relevant to them is addressed by schools in a meaningful and sustained way (Recommendation 11) and that schools and educational institutions are given a clear responsibility to address educational inequalities and promote inclusion and respect for diversity (Recommendation 12).

The Ministerial Advisory Group recognises that the proposal in this latter recommendation to apply the Section 75 statutory duty to schools and other educational institutions will represent a significant increase in their responsibilities. However, the lack of movement in relation to addressing the poor attainment levels of particular groups of children and young people, including Irish Travellers and children in care, is unacceptable. It is also a concern that whilst the experiences of black and minority ethnic children and young people and LGBT children and young people in terms of bullying and exclusion have been documented for many years, relatively little improvements have been witnessed.

It is for this reason that it is time that a statutory duty is placed directly on schools and educational institutions to ensure that they take seriously the responsibility to identify and develop clear plans for addressing the needs of children and young people from all Section 75 groups. The Ministerial Advisory Group recognises that complying with this duty will require additional efforts and thus it is also recommended that consideration should be given to whether some non-essential elements of the duties under Section 75 can be removed for schools (Recommendation 12) and that sufficient supports are put in place for schools and educational institutions to fulfill the duties that are placed upon them (Recommendation 13).

Finally, and as highlighted in this report, there are clear benefits to special schools and mainstream schools collaborating together in relation to improving educational outcomes for children with disabilities and those with special needs as well as increasing contact and relationships between children and young people in mainstream and special schools and also enhancing the sharing of specialist expertise. As such, there is a particular need to explore how best shared education might provide a framework for enhancing such collaborations (Recommendation 14).

### Recommendation 9

Schools and other educational establishments should develop more meaningful relationships with parents and caregivers to ensure that their rights to be involved in the education of their children are fully respected and supported. To achieve this, it is recommended that:

- ESA establish an appropriate network that supports schools and other educational institutions in developing relationships with parents and care-givers and in creating and sharing best practice regionally; and
- Schools and other educational establishments include a specific section in their Development Plans, that includes clear plans and goals, for how they intend to engage parents and caregivers and ensure their active and sustained support in the education of their children.

### Recommendation 10

An independent review should be undertaken of current practice in relation to the delivery of:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (Pre-School Education);
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2);
- Local and Global Citizenship (Key Stages 3 and 4); and
- The Curriculum Framework for Youth Work (Youth Service).

The review should consider the effectiveness of the current Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy and also include consideration of the opportunities that are provided for children and young people to discuss and explore issues associated with divisions, conflict and inequalities in Northern Ireland. The review should make

recommendations regarding the content of these areas of learning and also how teachers can best be supported to deliver these.

### Recommendation 11

In fulfillment of its duties under Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Department of Education should make it a requirement that all schools establish School Councils. Within this, School Councils need to:

- Be fully representative of the school body and of all year groups;
- Provide a mechanism for consulting children and young people on all school matters that affect them, including plans for shared education activities;
- Support children and young people in forming and expressing their views; and
- Include appropriate mechanisms for the views of children and young people to then be considered and given due weight by the school.

### Recommendation 12

The necessary legislation should be brought forward for schools and other educational institutions to be designated as 'public authorities' under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and thus to be required to comply with the statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. In doing this, consideration should be given to whether it is possible to reduce the demands that will be placed on schools and other educational institutions in terms of meeting their specific responsibilities under Section 75 whilst maintaining their core duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

### Recommendation 13

The Education and Skills Authority, in conjunction with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, should establish a unit to provide training, produce support materials and to advise schools and

educational institutions in relation to preparing, implementing and monitoring the equality schemes they would be required to produce under Section 75. It is expected that one aspect of meeting the duty to promote good relations will include engagement in shared education initiatives.

### Recommendation 14

The Department of Education should undertake a review of how shared education, and the enhanced collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools and educational support centres, can most effectively meet the needs of children and young people with disabilities, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with special educational needs. The review should focus on the development of effective models for collaboration that can:

- Ensure, wherever possible, that children and young people are taught in mainstream schools; and
- For the small minority of children and young people where mainstream schooling is not suitable, that they have meaningful opportunities to learn with children and young people in mainstream school environments.

### Area-Based Planning and the Schools Estate

The fourth core area to be addressed relates to the wider structural issues associated with area-based planning and the schools estate. As has been highlighted in the report, the area-based planning process provides a unique opportunity to consider and promote a range of shared education models (Recommendation 15). In addition, given the core principle of parental choice and the value placed on diversity in the school system, there is a need to develop mechanisms for supporting the establishment of new schools (Recommendation 16) and transforming existing schools (Recommendation 17) in line with the wishes of parents.

With regard to these latter two recommendations and the emphasis on encouraging greater diversity within the education system, it is worth noting the provisions made in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that states:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his [or her] choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his [or her] freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

[...]The State Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

As a minimum standard, this has been interpreted as schools and other educational institutions respecting the religious beliefs of their children and young people and allowing for parents to request that their children be withdrawn from participating in particular faith-based activities that might be organised.

However, this needs to be understood as a minimum standard or entitlement. As such, and in the spirit of this article and other related standards, there is an opportunity in Northern Ireland to go beyond this to play a more proactive role in supporting the religious, cultural and/or philosophical beliefs of parents and their children and young people.

### Recommendation 15

The Department of Education, Education and Library Boards and the CCMS should play an active role in promoting shared education through the area-based planning processes for post-primary and primary schools. This should include:

- Being proactive in identifying opportunities for shared education that may not have been considered and setting out options for schools and colleges to consider; and
- Supporting and advising schools that wish to develop shared education arrangements, including providing advice on how two or more schools can transfer their status into a 'shared school' whereby they maintain their respective forms of ethos.

### Recommendation 16

Where there is sufficient, viable and consistent parental demand, the Department of Education should actively support the establishment of schools and other educational institutions with a particular religious, philosophical or cultural ethos.

### Recommendation 17

In relation to all existing schools, the Department of Education should:

- Establish a transformation process for schools where there is clear parental demand wishing to adopt a particular ethos – whether, for example, this be faith-based, integrated, secular or Irish Medium – and to ensure that it is user friendly and not bureaucratic and that parents are made aware of their powers under the processes established;
- Identify how, in the light of parental demand, the process can be made easier whereby a school can incorporate the badge of a particular school type or sector in its title; and

- While recognising the responsibility of the Department to ensure the viability of schools in each local area, where there is clear evidence of over-subscription, it should allow existing schools to expand, in a phased and careful manner, in order to meet the demand that exists among parents.

## Academic Selection

Finally, and for the reasons set out earlier, there is a need to move beyond the current system of academic selection at age 11 if the true vision for shared education in Northern Ireland is to be achieved. As such, there is a need to remove academic selection at age 11 (Recommendation 18) and to reconsider how best the schools estate can be planned as a consequence (Recommendation 19).

In this regard, the Ministerial Advisory Group welcomes the unequivocal statement of the Catholic Bishops in Northern Ireland in June 2012 calling for the end of academic selection and also the commitment from others in the Catholic sector, including the Catholic Principals Association, to work towards creating a fully egalitarian system of post-primary education. The Group urges the Department of Education to provide what support it can to help facilitate and expedite this transition.

Having said this, and as made clear above, the Ministerial Advisory Group is not against academic selection as such but believes that there are more sophisticated and appropriate ways of applying academic selection, within the context of all-ability schools, that much better reflect the diversity of needs among children and young people. As such, and alongside removing academic selection at 11, it is important that a fundamental review is initiated of the use of banding and streaming within schools (Recommendation 20).

### Recommendation 18

The Northern Ireland Executive should, without delay, introduce the necessary legislation to prevent schools from selecting children on the basis of academic ability and require schools to develop admissions criteria that are truly inclusive and egalitarian in nature.

### Recommendation 19

The Department of Education, through the area-based planning process should consider how best to plan for sustainable post-primary schools with all-ability intakes. In doing this, the Department should have regard for parental demand in each local area for schools with a different religious, philosophical or cultural ethos and make every effort to ensure diversity of provision to meet this demand where it is feasible.

### Recommendation 20

The Department of Education should initiate a fundamental review of the use of selection within schools with all-ability intakes to explore the benefits and limitations of different models of banding and streaming. The review should be tasked with making recommendations regarding how best to take forward selection within schools so that all children and young people reach their full potential.

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## APPENDIX 1: LIST OF WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS, MEETINGS AND VISITS

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### Written Submissions

Written submissions were made by the following organisations and individuals. All of the submissions are available to view on the Ministerial Advisory Group's website at: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag>.

### Organisations

1. Action on Hearing Loss
2. Alliance Party
3. Association of School & College Leaders NI
4. Association of Teachers & Lecturers
5. Ballycastle High School
6. Belfast YMCA
7. Blackwater Integrated College, Downpatrick
8. Catholic Principals Association
9. Centre for Children's Rights, Queen's University Belfast
10. Change Makers
11. Colleges Northern Ireland (CNI)
12. Community Relations Council
13. Congregation of Dominican Sisters, Irish Region
14. Corran Integrated Primary School & Nursery Unit, Larne
15. Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
16. Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)
17. Dalriada School, Ballymoney
18. Disability Action

19. Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh
20. Early Years - the Organisation for Young People
21. Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
22. Erne Integrated College, Enniskillen
23. Fermanagh District Council
24. Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast
25. GTCNI
26. Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, Newtownabbey
27. Holy Child Primary School, Derry
28. Institute for Research in Social Science, University of Ulster, Jordanstown
29. International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies
30. Irish National Teachers' Organisation
31. Junior Achievement Ireland
32. Kilkeel High School
33. Loughshore, Belfast
34. Millennium Integrated Primary School, Saintfield
35. NAHT(NI)
36. NASUWT
37. National Deaf Children's Society
38. Newtownhamilton High School
39. NI Commissioner for Children & Young People
40. North Eastern Education & Library Board
41. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
42. Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
43. NUS-USI
44. Oakgrove Integrated Primary & Nursery School, Derry ~ Londonderry
45. Our Lady of Mercy School, Belfast

46. P.L.E.A.S.E group, Millennium Integrated Primary School, Saintfield
47. Park School & ERC, Belfast
48. Public Achievement
49. Rural Community Network NI
50. Saints & Scholars Integrated Primary & Nursery School, Armagh
51. Shared Education Learning Forum (SELF)
52. Sharing Education Programme, School of Education, Queen's University, Belfast
53. Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle
54. South Eastern Regional College (SERC)
55. Speedwell Trust
56. Sperrin Integrated College, Magherafelt
57. St Aidan's Action Group, Derrylin
58. St Gerard's ERC, Belfast
59. St Ignatius Antiochian Orthodox Church, Belfast
60. St John's Primary School, Bligh's Lane, Derry
61. St John's Primary School, Moy, Moy Regional Primary School & Moy Area Playgroup
62. St Joseph's College, Coleraine
63. St Joseph's Primary School, Bessbrook
64. St Joseph's Primary School, Meigh
65. St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel
66. St Mary's College, Derry
67. St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
68. St Mary's Pre-school Centre, Cloughcor, Ballymagorry, Strabane
69. St Mary's, Limavady
70. St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
71. St Pius X College, Magherafelt

72. Steeple Nursery School & St Joseph's Nursery School, Antrim
73. Stranmillis University College
74. The Fermanagh Trust
75. The Integrated Education Fund
76. The Rainbow Project
77. Transferor Representatives' Council
78. Ulster Farmers' Union
79. Ulster Teachers' Union
80. University & College Union
81. University of Ulster, Coleraine
82. Young Enterprise Northern Ireland

### Individuals

83. Wm Joseph Allen
84. Roger Austin
85. Colm Cavanagh
86. Albert Clyde
87. David Cupples
88. Ms Mary Gordon
89. Glenn Harvey
90. Professor Peter Finn
91. Bernie Kells
92. Stephen Keown
93. Mr JS Laverty
94. Anne Makin
95. Carmel McCavana
96. Maeve McEvoy
97. Carmel McKeown
98. Dr Helen McLaughlin

99. Ellen McVea
100. Mrs Pat Mulligan
101. Mr Maximos Murray (Rdr)
102. Yvonne Naylor
103. June Neill
104. John Peto
105. Norman Richardson
106. Catherine Seeley
107. Ken Smyth
108. Ken Thatcher
109. Alison Thompson
110. Helen Todd
111. Ian Williamson

### **Face-to-Face Meetings**

Following the receipt of the written submissions, 25 face-to-face meetings were held with the following organisations. Transcripts of all of the meetings are also available on the Ministerial Advisory Group's website at: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag>.

1. Catholic Principals Association
2. Colleges Northern Ireland
3. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
4. Community Relations Council
5. Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
6. Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)
7. Early Years – the Organisation for Young People
8. Education & Training Inspectorate
9. Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
10. Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)

11. General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)
12. Institute for Research in Social Science, University of Ulster
13. International Fund for Ireland & Atlantic Philanthropies
14. North Eastern Education & Library Board
15. Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education
16. Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
17. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
18. Public Achievement
19. Rural Community Network NI
20. Shared Education Learning Forum (SELF)
21. The Integrated Education Fund
22. The Orange Order
23. The Rainbow Project
24. Trade Unions representing the Education Sector
25. Transferor Representatives' Council

The Governing Bodies Association NI (GBA), that represents 52 Catholic and non-denominational grammar schools, was also invited to participate in a face-to-face meeting with the Ministerial Advisory Group. An original date for the meeting was agreed but this had to be re-arranged. Whilst a number of possible alternative times were offered, the GBA subsequently decided not to take up the offer of meeting the Group.

## Visits to Schools, Projects and Practitioners

During January 2013, members of the Ministerial Advisory Group also took the opportunity to visit the following schools, projects and practitioners involved in shared education:

- Councillors and Officials from Fermanagh District Council
- Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh
- Hobby Horse Playgroup & Roden Street Playgroup, Belfast
- Loughshore, Belfast
- Principals of schools that have participated in shared education projects in Co Fermanagh
- Southern Regional College, Newry
- St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel and Kilkeel High School
- St Mary's Primary School, Tempo and Tempo Primary School
- The Fermanagh Trust



## APPENDIX 2: ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL LEVEL PERFORMANCE DATA 2011/12

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### Introduction

This appendix provides details of the analysis of school-level GCSE examination results data for 2011/12 undertaken for this report. The data were released by the Department of Education to 'The Detail' website in response to a freedom of information request.

### The Dataset

The dataset is available to download from the website of 'The Detail'. The webpage carrying the story relating to the data is at:

<http://www.thedetail.tv/issues/152/exam-results-2012/gcse-and-a-level-results-for-all-nis-schools>

The actual dataset, available as an Excel spreadsheet, can be downloaded from the following link that appears on the above webpage:

<http://www.thedetail.tv/system/uploads/files/203/original/Full%20exam%20result%20data%20released%20by%20the%20Department%20of%20Education.xlsx?1354103023>

The dataset provides information for 211 of the 215 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. The analysis below focuses on the following variables extracted from the dataset:

- School type (two dummy variables representing grammar schools and integrated schools respectively. Secondary schools were therefore used as the reference category)

- Management type (one dummy variable representing catholic schools, with all other schools representing the reference category in this case)
- fsm - percentage of young people in each school entitled to free school meals (variable centred)
- sen - percentage of young people in each school with special educational needs (variable centred)
- size - total number of young people enrolled at the school (variable centred)
- gcses - percentage of eligible young people achieving five or more GCSE A\*-C grades, including English and maths (actual percentages)

## Analysis

Various regression models were fitted to the data, with 'gcse' as the dependent variable. Details of the models are provided in Table 9. It can be seen that Model 1 is the most parsimonious model that best fits the data.<sup>42</sup> As the variables 'fsm', 'sen' and 'size' have all been centred then the constant represents the estimated mean score for the reference category of schools, in this case secondary, non-Catholic schools.

As Model 1 indicates, on average, and when controlling for intake differences (namely, the percentage entitled to FSM, the percentage with SEN and the size of the school), 42.2% of young people attending non-Catholic secondary schools are likely to achieve the GCSE benchmark of five or more A\*-C passes, including maths and English. The model also suggests that this figure increases by 8.8 percentage points for those attending a Catholic school and by a further 25.6 percentage points for those attending a grammar school.

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<sup>42</sup> The dummy variable 'integrated' was added to Model 1 but it was found not to add anything significant to the model and so was removed. What this indicates is that, once the other variables in the model are controlled for, there is no difference in the GCSE performance of young people in integrated schools compared to secondary schools (the reference category).

Models 2 to 5 confirm that this added value of attending a grammar school is not mediated by any of the other variables listed. In other words, this grammar school effect of a boost in 25.6 percentage points is likely to be consistent across all types of school.

**Table 9: Linear Regression Models Fitted to School-Level Data (Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
constant	42.233 (1.502)	41.840 (1.586)	42.125 (1.526)	42.261 (1.505)	42.350 (1.450)
grammar	25.615 (3.090)	27.414 (3.864)	22.686 (7.460)	28.808 (5.632)	28.420 (3.576)
fsm	-1.018 (0.114)	-1.025 (0.115)	-1.013 (0.115)	-1.006 (0.116)	-1.009 (0.114)
sen	-0.297 (0.103)	-0.300 (0.103)	-0.300 (0.104)	-0.317 (0.108)	-0.282 (0.103)
size	0.010 (0.003)	0.010 (0.003)	0.010 (0.004)	0.010 (0.004)	0.013 (0.004)
catholic	8.803 (2.283)	9.798 (2.620)	9.043 (2.354)	8.810 (2.286)	8.784 (2.275)
catholic*grammar		-3.737 (4.811)			
fsm*grammar			-0.210 (0.486)		
sen*grammar				0.242 (0.357)	
size*grammar					-0.013 (0.009)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	77.79%	77.75%	77.70%	77.73%	77.94%

## Findings

From Model 1, we can estimate what a particular type of school is likely to achieve in terms of the percentage of its young people attaining the GCSE benchmark of five or more GCSE grades A\*-C, including English and maths:

- Non-Catholic Secondary Schools 42.2%
- Catholic Secondary Schools 51.0%
- Non-Catholic Grammar Schools 67.8%
- Catholic Grammar Schools 76.6%

The figures above are based upon the school-level data and provide the best and most reliable estimate of what each of the four types of school is likely to achieve with an average intake of young people.<sup>43</sup> In this case, the average intake is simply the mean scores for the three variables 'fsm', 'sen' and 'size'. As such, the above estimates are based upon a school with:

- 21% of young people entitled to free school meals
- 22% of young people with special educational needs
- total enrolment of 685 young people

To estimate the 'grammar school effect', Model 1 was run again but with the variable 'catholic' removed. This gave a coefficient for the constant of 45.530 (se = 1.276) and for the dummy variable 'grammar' of 29.236 (se = 3.041). This indicates that the average performance of non-grammar schools, based on an average intake, is estimated to be 45.53% of pupils achieving the GCSE benchmark. For the average grammar school, with the same intake, the performance is expected to increase by 29.24 percentage points to 74.77%.

From the above estimates, the odds of a young person achieving the GCSE benchmark if attending a non-grammar school is therefore 0.84<sup>44</sup> (i.e. 45.53/54.47). Similarly, the odds for a young person attending a grammar school is 2.96<sup>45</sup> (i.e. 74.77/25.23). Thus it can be concluded that odds of a young person achieving the GCSE benchmark will be 3.5 times higher if they attend a grammar school (i.e. 2.96/0.84).

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<sup>43</sup> These figures above are clearly different to the raw data. For example, and from the dataset, it can be calculated that the average for all Catholic grammar schools is 93.8%. However, it needs to be remembered that the percentage of young people entitled to FSM at Catholic grammar schools is much lower than average at just 10% and the percentage with SEN in such schools is just 8%. The figures quoted above are calculated from Model 1 and use the data for the whole sample to estimate what Catholic grammar schools would get if they had the average proportion entitled to FSM and who were SEN.

<sup>44</sup> This odds ratio can be interpreted to mean that for every 84 young people who attend a secondary school with the average intake and who achieve the GCSE benchmark, there will be 100 who do not.

<sup>45</sup> Similarly, this can be interpreted to mean that for every 296 young people at grammar school with the average intake and who achieve the GCSE benchmark, there will be 100 who do not.



Further copies of this Executive Summary, in English and Irish, can be downloaded from the website: [www.qub.ac.uk/mag](http://www.qub.ac.uk/mag) as can copies of the full report and associated documents.

