

IN CONFIDENCE

Minister

INTEGRATION IN THE EDUCATION SERVICE

1. You asked for a report to be prepared on the level of religious integration which exists in Northern Ireland within present educational arrangements and we have been working on this over the past few weeks.
2. It has now been completed and as you will see it indicates that there is a great deal more integration in the education and allied services than is usually appreciated; for although it is the schools sector which tends to attract most of the attention outside Northern Ireland, it is not often understood, or is ignored, that much of the remainder of the education and allied services is integrated and that even in the schools themselves there is a substantial amount of inter-denominational activity.
3. In Northern Ireland/^{the} attitude of the Roman Catholic Church together with the segregated nature of public sector housing in the Province have the greatest influence on the present and likely future extent of integration in the education sector. The Church has consistently maintained its policy of providing separate schools for its children and most Roman Catholic parents choose to send their children to those schools. While this continues, and there is no evidence of major change, the opportunities for real movement towards broadly based integration is very limited indeed. At the same time it is encouraging that the Church has co-operated in the development of inter-school activities which encourage contact between children of different denominations.
4. Segregated housing has been exacerbated by the disturbances of the last 10 years and has exerted a great and detrimental influence over community integration. The enrolment at schools, the membership of youth clubs, the attendance at community and recreation centres will all reflect the denominational character of the immediate area and where areas are segregated on denominational lines, there is little or no scope for the people of the area to meet with others of different backgrounds or religions. This is particularly true in areas of Belfast and Londonderry. However there are a number of other areas where people of different religions live and work together. In these circumstances they have had an opportunity to build up mutual confidence and here efforts at integration, in schooling and elsewhere, are somewhat easier and therefore much more often found.
5. Attempts have been made in the past by Government and others to influence the progress towards integrated education by legislation. One such initiative was the proposal for "Shared Schools" put forward in April 1974 by Mr McIvor, Minister of Education in the power-sharing Executive. This aroused considerable opposition and after consultation with those concerned the then Minister (Mr Moyle) was forced to concede in September 1975 that he did not have a mandate to proceed with the Scheme.

6. There is now general recognition that Integrated Education can only develop in response to a genuine desire for it on the part of the community and that there can be no question of Government forcing the pace in any way. Instead the Government's main role is to ensure that no unnecessary impediments are placed in the way and for this reason and despite our reservations about its potential there may be some tactical advantages in tidying up the deficiencies which have come to light in the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1978.

7. Looking ahead, the most significant issue which could have an influence on possibilities for integration is that of School Management. The Astin Working Party were asked to consider the Management of Schools in Northern Ireland with regard to "the Government's wish to ensure that integration, where it is desired, should be facilitated and not impeded". However it made no specific recommendations on the subject and stated that its principal concern in that direction was that its recommendations should not introduce new obstacles and that so far as possible the many similarities between schools should be reflected in management structures. There is evidence emerging, however, that the Roman Catholic Church is preparing itself to oppose any changes in school management in so far as maintained schools are concerned and insisting that the arrangements established in 1968 are as far as they are prepared to proceed. In this context you will recall that the Taylor Report "A New Partnership for our Schools" made only a passing reference to voluntary school management in England and Wales because those schools had been specifically excluded from the Committee's terms of reference.

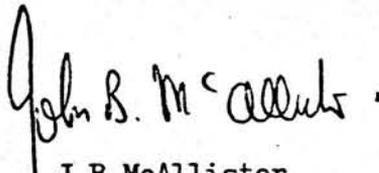
8. There is no doubt that the Roman Catholic Church remains sensitive on this point and there is a real danger that if pressure is exerted on them in relation to the Astin Report with any suggestion that it is a move towards Integrated Education the Hierarchy may react by moving into an overly defensive position. We must, therefore, recognise the underlying danger that the Church may view Astin, the Review of Higher Education and its implications for the denominational Colleges of Education and the impact of the Black Report, which at least implies the removal of St Patrick's Training School, as a concerted attack on the voluntary sector in general and the Roman Catholic element of it in particular.

9. There are also 2 other important aspects which must be taken into consideration. Firstly, it would be extremely unfortunate at this point in time with active consideration of a political initiative for the Province now underway if Integrated Education were to be brought into the forefront of the public eye and become a political issue. Secondly, while there is undoubtedly a great deal of emotional and theoretical support for Integrated Education, especially among the middle classes where some degree of mutual trust has been established, there has never **effectively been any groundswell of opinion actively pressing for change.**

10. It is my view that integration will be best served by leaving it to develop much as it has done in the past: quietly, without publicity and certainly without overt pressure from Government. Indeed in certain areas of work such as the Youth Service any publicity which has been given in the past to inter-denominational activities has proved counter-productive and even dangerous to workers and teachers who are active in promoting contact between the 2 communities. However, there is little doubt that many people are keen to take advantage of the opportunities which are offered to them to meet, work and discuss with those of different denominations and judging by the many successful schemes which are being organised for schools in the Province, there are many dedicated individuals, teachers, ^{and} youth leaders who are working hard to promote understanding between the 2 communities. Much unobtrusive support can be given to these efforts. Your own emphasis on the importance of talking and listening to each other is a good example of setting the right atmosphere.

11. The paper which I attach attempts to outline the extent of integration throughout the education sector and is based upon comments provided by the various Divisions. The appendix has been prepared by the Inspectorate and provides many examples of existing inter-denominational activity which have come to the attention of Inspectors in the course of their work.

12. I would be happy to discuss.


J B McAllister

17 December 1979

cc Mr Bell
Mr Parkes
Mr Martin
Mr Wallace