Integrated education: a review of policy and research evidence 1999-2012

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Contents

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Foreword

It is just over 30 years since the establishment of the first planned, integrated school in Northern Ireland. The literature suggests that there have been three distinct periods of development. The 1980s was characterised by parent-led initiatives supported by charitable trusts and foundations such as Nuffield and Joseph Rowntree to establish a number of new integrated schools, initially without statutory funding. A decade later, the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 placed a responsibility on the Department of Education 'to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education' and included statutory funding for integrated schools, but the policy emphasis during the 1990s shifted to 'transformation' of existing schools and this process has only been activated by controlled schools. Following the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998 responsibility for education policy was eventually devolved to local politicians within a Northern Ireland Assembly and by 2006 a Strategic Review of Education (the Bain Report) highlighted a decline in pupil enrolments (currently there are 1,070 schools and 85,000 unused places) and the need for greater integration within the education system. Opinions differ, however on how best to achieve greater integration. There would seem to be three broad strategies that could form the basis for education policy:

Firstly, there are those who argue for a system of common schools, attended by pupils from all traditions. The establishment of 62 integrated, 'common' schools serving 21,747 pupils (7% of the school population) is a considerable achievement in the midst of conflict and within a divided society. Those who advocate for planned integration argue that a separate school system is one of the key institutions that helps reproduce 'two communities' from generation to generation, and fundamental structural change to separate schooling is needed to achieve the future goal of greater social cohesion. But to date government has interpreted its statutory responsibility 'to encourage and facilitate integrated education' as a requirement only to be responsive to parental demand, rather than education authorities actively seeking opportunities to increase the number of integrated or common schools.

A second argument is that integration need not be planned, but will happen organically as all schools become more inclusive and open to enrolment from other traditions. In 2002 the Department of Education (DE) indicated that there were 42 'mixed' schools (7 under Catholic and 35 under other management) each with at least a 10% enrolment of 'the other community'. However, more recent DE figures show that almost half of Northern Ireland's school children are still being taught in schools where 95% or more of the pupils are of the

same religion. As a strategy for social change this seems like a passive approach with no real incentives for schools to become more inclusive beyond maintaining school numbers. Neither does the strategy necessitate any change to diversity in staff or joint management by diverse stakeholders.

A third argument is that separate schooling is inevitable and will continue for the foreseeable future and the best strategy may be to promote more contact and collaboration between schools of different traditions. This is not a new concept as schools have been involved in cross-community contact over the past 30 years. However, there has been greater emphasis on the concept of 'shared' education since the Bain Report in 2006, devolution in 2007 and significant funding from non-statutory sources such as the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies.

This report was commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) as a contribution to this debate. Its purpose was to review policy and research evidence related to integrated education in Northern Ireland (1999-2012). The review analysed existing documentation in five main areas: political party manifestos; key education policy documents; social surveys; academic research on the educational, societal and economic benefits of integrated education; and lessons from other international contexts. The findings and conclusions are provided in more detail later in the report, but it is worth highlighting three major implications arising from the review:

Firstly, political and policy discourse has shifted towards the concept of 'shared education' despite public support for 'integrated education' remaining extremely high. The current discourse on shared education assumes that the vast majority of our children will continue to be educated in separate schools for the foreseeable future. By accepting this political parties move towards education policies that plan for separate development rather than structural change and reform of the separate school system. This shift is now reflected in key education policy documents. For example, the new Education Bill (2012) makes no direct reference to integrated education despite government having a statutory responsibility to encourage and facilitate. No formal representation for integrated education is proposed in the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and there is no reference to integrated education in the Programme for Government (2011-15). Political manifestos and policy initiatives in Northern Ireland do not reflect many of the preferences expressed by parents and the wider population as represented in survey data. Over the last decade this data consistently reports that public support for formally integrated schools remains very

high in terms of its contribution to peace and reconciliation, promoting a shared future, and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Secondly, we need a sharper definition of terminology, particularly the distinctions between policies to support 'integrated', 'mixed' and 'shared' education and how we prioritise investment in education to create an economically viable and socially cohesive society.

For policy implementation to be effective a much clearer distinction between 'integrated', 'mixed', and 'shared' schooling needs to be drawn. This would help determine whether limited resources will be concentrated mainly on supporting integrated education (common schools attended daily by children from diverse traditions); mixed schools (separate schools with a significant minority from other traditions); or shared education (separate schools with some shared resources, pupil contact and collaboration between them). It may not be possible to pursue these simultaneously, since prioritisation of one will have an impact on the others given that there are finite resources available. Estimates of the economic benefits of changes to the education system have proven difficult. A fully integrated system of common schools would clearly be less costly in terms of school estate and could secure the viability of schools in small rural communities, but the economic savings have not been fully researched. Alternatively, it may be possible to prioritise policies that incentivise existing schools to become more 'mixed' by attracting greater numbers from other traditions. This route has been explored to some extent by 'transforming' schools, but we do not know what the full costs would be in extending financial incentives and support across the whole system. In terms of 'shared' education we have many years experience of supporting cross-community contact and movement of pupils between schools. However, in recent years the Department of Education has actually reduced its financial commitment to these activities. The current initiatives on shared education are supported by more than £10 million funding from philanthropy and extending arrangements to the whole system would cost significantly more. The challenge will be whether there will subsequently be sufficient commitment of statutory funding to sustain sharing policies once charitable sources disappear – the experience of previous cross-community schemes suggest that school involvement falls away without sustained, additional funding.

Lastly, Northern Ireland is not unique in looking to education as a means of developing social cohesion. Each context is different but even this brief review highlights some key issues relevant to education policy in Northern Ireland. In Britain, for example, there are schools jointly managed by the churches, which is not an option that has been explored actively by the churches in Northern Ireland. In the Republic of Ireland the majority

of schools are owned or managed by the Catholic Church, but multi-denominational schools have also been established and the recent Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2012) has made recommendations for changes to the patronage of schools and divesting of ownership to the State to reflect movement towards *'a more culturally and religiously diverse contemporary Irish society'*. And, whilst the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is even more fragmented along ethnic lines than Northern Ireland, the examples of 'two schools under one roof' suggest caution about pragmatic approaches to share school premises if there is no deeper commitment to structural and social change within society.

This review coincides with the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education which is due to report in February 2013. The Advisory Group's terms of reference refers to the need to take into account issues such as '…preferences of learners and parents in relation to shared education' but also 'the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches, and of best practice, locally and internationally'. The mandate also asks the group to look at 'how the advancement of shared education might address issues such as ethos and identity' as well as 'barriers to the advancement of shared education'. There is no reference to integrated education within the document.

There is an urgent need for much deeper public engagement in these issues and for clearer thinking about the long term implications of distinctions between integration, mixed and shared education. We suggest there is the need for an informed debate on where current education policies are leading us and what our ultimate destination as a society might be.

I hope this brief review is a useful contribution.

Professor Alan Smith
UNESCO Chair
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January 2013

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report, 'Integrated Education: A Review of Policy and Research Evidence 1999-2012', is to undertake a critical analysis of policy development and research evidence into the educational, societal and economic benefits of integrated education in Northern Ireland since 1999. The analysis has the following key objectives:

- To review the manifestos of Northern Ireland political parties in relation to integrated education and to report any significant changes in education policy positions during the period 1999-2012;
- To identify any key changes in education policy in Northern Ireland towards the provision of integrated education during the period 1999-2012. This should include references to changes in education policy which impacted on other sectors;
- To review surveys on attitudes in Northern Ireland towards integrated education and to demonstrate clearly any changing trends in attitude during the period 1999 – 2012;
- To review research evidence on educational, societal and economic benefits of integrated education in Northern Ireland and identify where the evidence indicates any significant changes in those areas;
- To review relevant research into the impact of integrated and other similar models of education in other countries.

Northern Ireland party political manifestos and integrated education

The review of party political manifestos highlights a shift in policies regarding integrated education amongst the Northern Ireland political parties over the last decade. Collectively, the manifestos reflect a wider trend to promote the idea of 'shared' education whilst putting less emphasis on the concept of 'integrated' education. For example, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) moved from being critical of integrated education in earlier manifestos to more recent calls for a strategy for 'sharing and integration' within the education system. Similarly, the Alliance Party which has historically been the strongest advocate of integrated education in Northern Ireland has widened its statements to include more references to 'shared' education opportunities. This pattern is repeated in other party manifestos and would seem to point to a wider trend to promote the idea of 'shared' education and less emphasis on the structural and institutional changes implied by 'integrated' education. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when this change occurred, but the evidence from the manifestos suggests that it has accelerated since the publication of the Independent Strategic Review of

Education (The Bain Report) in December 2006 and devolution in May 2007. The shift has also taken place within a changing economic climate, with the view that increased sharing of resources among and between schools in Northern Ireland will save money.

Key changes in education policy

In terms of education policy, the concept of integrated education was endorsed in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, 1998 and the subsequent Shared Future document published in March 2005, but later Executive documents, such as the strategy for Cohesion Sharing and Integration Consultation Document (July 2010) and the Northern Ireland Programme for Government (2011-2015) avoid any direct references to integrated education and the role it will play in future policy. Current educational reform, such as the Education Bill (2012) and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) do not refer directly to integrated education or to the duty of the Department of Education to 'encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education'. Instead, there is an emphasis on sharing in education and 'integrating education' rather than a policy to increase the number of integrated schools. A Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education was established in 2012 as part of the Programme for Government (2011-15), but there is no explicit reference to integrated education within its mandate.

Attitudes towards integrated education

Attitudinal data, based on surveys such as Millward Brown Ulster (2008, 2003); Ipsos MORI (2011); Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS) (2003-2011); and Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT) (1999-2010), indicates that support and preference for integrated schools remains high. For example, in 2003 a majority of people surveyed (82%) personally supported integrated education in Northern Ireland and in 2011 this had increased to 88% of those surveyed. The proportion of respondents who viewed integrated education as 'very important to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland' increased from 60% in 2003 to 69% in 2011. The Northern Ireland Life and Times (1999) and Young Life and Times (2003-2010) surveys found that over one third of respondents would like to send their children to an integrated school if there was one in the vicinity. Further surveys, such as Millward Brown (2008) and MORI (2011) also found that a majority of people also support schools sharing facilities, partnering or collaborating across the traditional school sectors. Crudely aggregating recent data from Ipsos MORI (2011) with the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT 1999 and 2001) suggests that support for 'mixed schooling' has increased from 74% in 1999 to 81% in 2011.

The educational, societal and economic benefits of integrated education

There has been little research on educational attainment in integrated schools beyond analysis of examination results in comparison with other school types (DEL, 2008; Gallagher *et al.,* 2003). The evidence suggests that pupils perform at least as well academically at GCSE and A-level as pupils from other non-selective schools.

In terms of societal benefits, attendance at an integrated school is claimed to be important in shaping identity without a loss of community or social individuality (Niens *et al.*, 2003; Montgomery *et al*., 2003). Research evidence formulated around the contact hypothesis, particularly the role of intergroup contact in fostering good relations suggests that integrated schooling has a significant and positive social influence on the lives of those who experience it, most notably in terms of fostering cross-community friendships, reducing prejudicial attitudes and promoting a sense of security in religious, racial, or ethnically diverse environments (Stringer, 2009, 2000; Montgomery *et al.,* 2003; McGlynn, 2001; Irwin, 1991). Other research (Stringer *et al.,* 2009, 2000) has found that the intergroup contact of integrated or mixed schools can influence social attitudes, with pupils adopting more positive positions on key social issues such as politics, religion, identity, mixed marriages and integrated education and less positive positions on segregated education although the extent to which it impacts on individuals' religious or political identities is less clear (Hayes and McAllister 2009; Hayes, *et al.,* 2006). Further studies (for example, McGlynn, 2003; Montgomery *et al.,* 2003) lend support to these findings where cohorts of past pupils felt that integrated education had a significant positive impact on their lives.

There have been two main studies on the economic impact of a more integrated education system (Oxford Economics, 2010; Deloitte, 2007) and both suggest that sharing and integration bring economic benefits when compared to the cost of separate schooling. An education system characterised by shared facilities may offer some financial savings, but there are also additional costs in maintaining a system based on sharing between separate schools (such as transport and movement of pupils between schools). A unified system of common schools is likely to offer greater savings in terms of necessary infrastructure, maintenance costs, staffing, reduction in transport costs to separate schools and potential viability of small schools in rural communities.

Other contexts

From the short analysis of the case studies outlined in the report it is clear that Northern Ireland is not unique in looking to education as a means of developing social cohesion. Each context is different but even a brief review highlights some key issues relevant to education policy in Northern Ireland. In Britain, for example, there are schools jointly managed by the churches, which is not an option that has been explored actively by the churches in Northern Ireland. In the Republic of Ireland the majority of schools are owned or managed by the Catholic Church, but multi-denominational schools have been established and the recent Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2012) has made recommendations for changes to the patronage of schools and divesting of ownership to the State to reflect movement towards *'a more culturally and religiously diverse contemporary Irish society'*. The experience of desegregation in the United States raises questions about the impact and sustainability of statutory approaches to desegregation when compared to policies to support voluntary integration. The education system in Bosnia-Herzegovina is even more fragmented along ethnic lines than Northern Ireland and the examples of 'two schools under one roof' suggest caution about pragmatic approaches to share school premises if there is no deeper commitment to structural and social change within society.

Synopsis of Conclusions

Drawing on the evidence and analysis of the report 'Integrated Education: A Review of Policy and Research Evidence 1999-2012', which is briefly outlined in this document, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

1. Political and policy discourse in Northern Ireland over the reporting period has shifted from 'integrated education' towards the concept of 'shared education'.

2. Key policy documents now make no explicit reference to integrated education, despite a statutory responsibility to support and facilitate.

3. The policy discourse requires clearer definition of terminology, particularly the distinctions between policies to support integrated, mixed and shared education.

4. Public support for integrated education remains extremely high, but education policies are based on maintaining separate schools.

5. Integrated education can contribute to social cohesion.

6. The economic benefits of integration, mixing and sharing needs clarified.

7. The challenge of creating greater social cohesion through education is not unique to Northern Ireland.

The above conclusions are provided in greater detail in the full report,
'Integrated education: a review of policy and research evidence 1999-2012'.
To access the full report please go to www.ief.org.uk.