

Same Difference? Shared Education and Integrated Education

1. The Purpose

The structure of the school system in Northern Ireland ensures that the overwhelming majority of children learn in an environment where they are surrounded on all sides by pupils who share their community identity and are isolated from those from the other main community. There is widespread recognition that the divided structure of education reflects and maintains ethnic separation in an already deeply fractured society, and that significant social capital could be gained if children were to be educated together. Two different models have emerged in response to the deficit in cross-community contact between pupils in school: Shared Education and Integrated Education. While both aspire to bringing children together, each draws on a fundamentally different philosophy and perspective, and each faces a different set of challenges. However, the two concepts are frequently conflated or confused. "Educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom"¹ was what the Northern Ireland Executive committed to in the *New Decade, New Approach* document, but that wording is open to very different interpretations. This paper sets out to clarify the differences in Shared and Integrated Education by examining the history and rationale behind each approach in order to identify the issues that each must overcome if education is to make a lasting change to the endemic pattern of systemic segregation.

2. Background

2.1 A 'Segregated' System of Schooling?

The first state-sanctioned system of education in Ireland was instigated in the wake of a letter from the Chief Secretary of Ireland, E. G. Stanley, to the Duke of Leinster, in 1831. The resulting National School System aspired to "unite in one system children of different creeds."² Joint applications from Catholic and Protestant clergy and congregations/parishioners to set up new schools were actively encouraged, but denominational protectionism and community enmity meant that, over time, "any semblance of integration was lost and most of these national schools took on the complexion and ethos of their majority community."³

A century ago, Ireland was split acrimoniously into two separate states. The government in the newly created Northern Ireland began the process of reorganising the provision of education within their territory. The architect of this new system was a prominent Unionist peer, Lord Londonderry. His vision was of a single system that would be open to pupils of all denominations; religious instruction would not be permitted during school hours and school authorities were to be prohibited from taking religion into account in the appointment of teachers. In order for Londonderry's vision to be realised, the Churches on both sides would be required to hand over the schools that they had set up following the Stanley Letter to the state. The proposed model, however, met with opposition on both sides. The Catholic Bishops withdrew from negotiations on the new system which they saw as threatening to both their faith and their Irish cultural identity, while the Protestant Churches were insistent that, if they were to be expected to surrender the ownership of their schools, then they would need to retain a significant measure of management control. Both sides demanded the right to provide religious instruction and to appoint teachers who would preserve their faith.

¹ British and Irish Governments (2020) *New Decade, New Approach*, p.7.

² The Stanley Letter (1831) <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Boards-of-Management/Stanley-letter-1831-Boards-Of-Management.pdf>

³ Gallagher, T. (2016) Shared Education in Northern Ireland: School Collaboration in Divided Societies, *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(3) 362-375

Nevertheless, in 1923, the government pushed ahead with an Education Act that attempted to create a unified system. The act was, unsurprisingly, met with resistance. Pressures from both sides led to significant revisions, amendments and, ultimately, by 1930 the vision of a common non-denominational system had been abandoned. Almost all of the former national schools that had been managed by Protestant denominations came under the control of the Ministry of Education (Controlled schools). Catholic schools (and a very small number of other schools) remained at arms-length but, in return for state funding for teachers' salaries and a contribution to basic running costs, accepted a management structure that included two state education officials and four church appointees (Maintained schools). Northern Ireland was also home to a number of Protestant-denominational, non-denominational and Catholic schools, academies and institutions that prepared students for university, an ecclesiastical career and the professions. These received nominal state support and retained their independence as Voluntary grammar schools.⁴

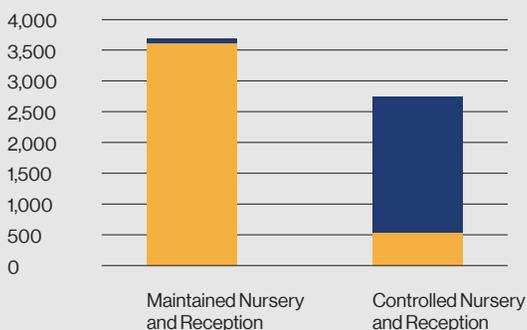
Thus, in spite of Londonderry's aspirations, since the creation of Northern Ireland the structure of the educational system has remained segregated along the traditional, national-political-religious axis between Protestants and Catholics.⁵ Many have proposed that although the structural division of education may not have directly fuelled inter-community animosity, its role has hardly been benign.

"The general model of schooling does more to contribute to the underlying causes of conflict than it does to peace."⁶

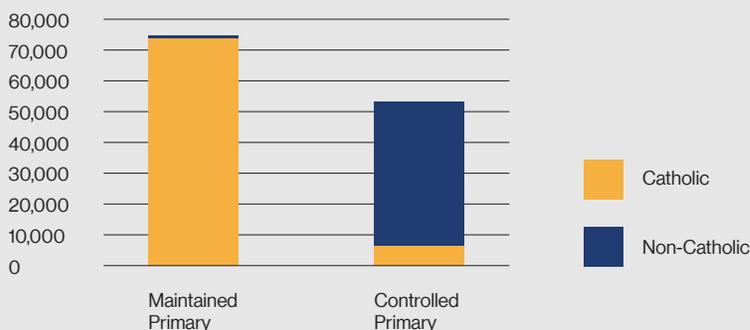
The historical separation of schools along community and religious lines remains a dominant feature of the educational system. The Department of Education's statistics for the 2020-21 school year document that, of the 804 state-funded primary schools in Northern Ireland, 218 had no Protestant pupils on their roll-books and 56 had no Catholic pupils. The same set of statistics show that a further 270 primaries had fewer than five pupils from 'the other side'. Ultimately, 68% of primary school pupils are educated in institutions that are wholly or very significantly segregated along religious lines.⁷

This level of segregation is not limited to primary schools. A similar pattern can be observed in the figures for the religious composition of those enrolled at Controlled and Maintained Reception and nursery schools, Controlled and Maintained post primary schools, and non-denominational and Catholic Voluntary grammar schools.

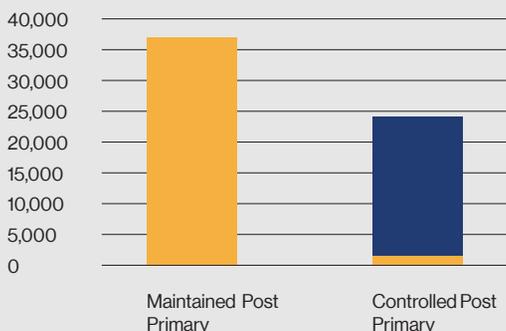
Nursery and Reception segregation 2020-21



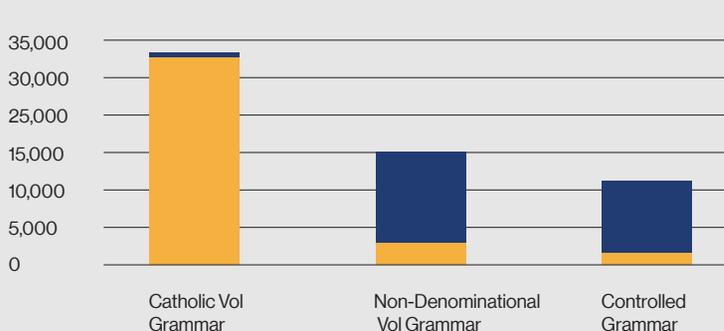
Primary school segregation 2020-21



Non-selective post primary segregation 2020-21



Grammar school segregation 2020-21



This pattern is also not limited to pupils. The segregation that is evident in the classroom is reflected in the staffroom and the board room; in the deployment of teachers⁸ and in the composition of schools' Boards of Governors.⁹ This state of affairs persists in spite of frequent opinion polls that show that a significant majority of people favour a more inclusive model of education. The most recent of these, published in August 2021, indicated that eight-in-ten felt that all schools, regardless of type, should aim to draw pupils, teachers and governors from a range of different communities.

⁴ Gardner, J. (2016) Education in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement: Kabuki Theatre Meets Danse Macabre, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 42, no. 3: 348

⁵ Hayes, B. McAllister, I. and Dowds, L. (2007) Integrated Education, Intergroup Relations, and Political Identities in Northern Ireland, *Social Problems*, vol. 54, no. 4: 457.

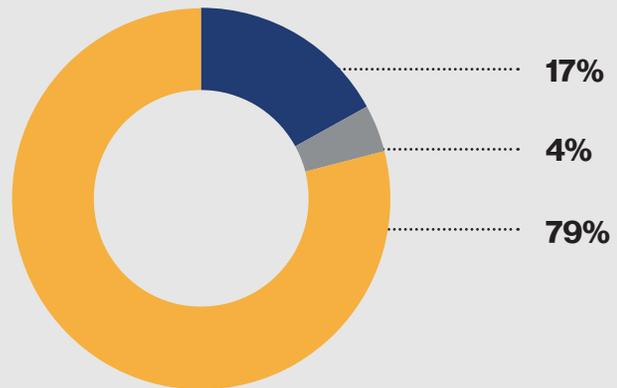
⁶ Ben-Nun, M. (2013) The 3Rs of Integration: Respect, Recognition and Reconciliation; Concepts and Practices of Integrated Schools in Israel and Northern Ireland, *Journal of Peace Education*, vol. 10, no. 1: 2.

⁷ Figures adapted from DE 2020-21 statistics <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolment-school-level-date-202021>

⁸ Milliken, M. (2019) employment Mobility of Teachers and the FETO Exception *Transforming Education Briefing Paper, 01*, Ulster University, April 2019

⁹ Milliken, M. (2020) The Governance of Schools *Transforming Education Briefing Paper, 05*, Ulster University, September 2020

Should all schools, regardless of type, aim to have a religious and cultural mix of pupils, teachers and governors?



LucidTalk Survey - August 2021

2.2 What is Integrated Education?

2.2.1 Definition

There are many different definitions of what is meant by the term Integrated Education, but common themes are evident. Under Article 64 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 (which also provided a statutory framework for the development of integrated schools) Integrated education is defined as:

“The education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils.”¹⁰

The Department of Education states that...

“Integrated Education brings children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths, or none, together in one school. Integrated Schools ensure that children from diverse backgrounds are educated together.”¹¹

While the Integrated Education Fund characterises it as follows:

“Integrated schools bring together children and adults from Catholic, Protestant and other backgrounds in each school. The schools strive to achieve a religious balance of pupils, teachers and governors and acknowledge and respect the cultural diversity they represent.”¹²

Three words are echoed in each of these definitions: Protestant, Catholic and Together.

2.2.2 The History of Integrated Education

In 1973 the Catholic authorities acted to prohibit Catholic pupils who attended non-Catholic schools from the conferring of Confirmation. A small group of Catholic parents whose children were affected directly by this ruling sought to challenge a decision which they felt was “denying faith development to their children” – they had no intention of establishing a new school sector.¹³ The group set up a charity to lobby the Catholic Church for a relaxation of their position and to encourage greater cross-sectoral co-operation.¹⁴ They adopted the name “All Children Together” (ACT). In 1974, at the height of the ‘Troubles’, a short-lived political resolution was brokered that brought the main Nationalist and Unionist political parties together in a power-sharing Executive; a Shared School Plan was announced. A few Protestant parents, inspired by the idea of creating common schools, joined ACT to help to mobilise support. The Executive was, however, quickly brought down by organised Loyalist opposition. Notwithstanding this setback, ACT sought to build momentum by organising a conference, “Integrated Schools: How? Why? And the Way Ahead” and in 1976 published a paper with proposals for the shared management of schools in Northern Ireland. The paper suggested a model for integrating existing schools in conjunction with the creation of a curriculum which would include historical and cultural studies alongside a common structure of religious and moral education.

With the support of Lord Dunleath, ACT drafted a Bill to allow existing schools to become integrated. The so-called Dunleath Act became law in 1978 but, by 1981, no school had chosen to follow this path and, at their Annual General Meeting that year, ACT passed a resolution to establish “an integrated all-ability post-primary college for Catholic and Protestant boys and girls.”¹⁵ In September 1981 Lagan College opened its doors as an Independent Integrated School with 28 pupils in a scout hut in the Castlereagh hills lying to the east of Belfast.¹⁶

Inspired by this initiative, a number of trusts were set up across Northern Ireland with the aim of establishing schools to educate children together. In 1986 legislation was created that allowed schools to transform to Integrated status while remaining within the state system.

By 1987 Lagan College had been joined by nine other Integrated schools that had been set up by similarly-minded groups of parents. Together they established a collective representative body: the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). In 1989 the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order empowered the Department of Education (DE) to provide support to a development body for Integrated Education. NICIE was recognised as that body; core funding from DE followed in 1991. The 1989 Order also placed a duty on DE to “encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.”

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/contents>

¹¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/integrated-schools>

¹² <https://www.ief.org.uk/about-us/integrated-education/>

¹³ Wardlow, M. (2014) “Essentially Christian in Character? Ethos in integrated schools” PhD Thesis, QUB; 16-17 https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/182151564/Wardlow_Essentially_Christian_69717591.pdf

¹⁴ Linehan, C. (2003) All Children Together: The struggle of Catholic parents to have their children educated with Protestant children in Northern Ireland, Unpublished MPhil dissertation, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin. Cited in Wardlow (2014) *Ibid*

¹⁵ <http://www.lagancollege.com/about/>

¹⁶ Linehan, C. (2014) “Integrated Education – A Historical Perspective” in BBC “A State Apart” https://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/history/stateapart/agreement/reconciliation/support/rec2_c031.shtml

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was set up in 1992 with a cocktail of funding (from the European Structural Funds, the Department of Education, the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust) with the aim of supporting the further development of Integrated Education.

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998 recognised the need to create “a culture of tolerance at every level of society” and reaffirmed the earlier pledge “to facilitate and encourage integrated education” as a key component of the reconciliation process.¹⁷ The Agreement also included a clause that placed a general duty on all public bodies (excluding schools) to pay due regard to the promotion of equality (Section 75).

In 2012 NICIE was designated as a Non-Departmental Public Body, ensuring funding and terms and conditions for employees comparable to those employed in the public sector.

DE statistics record that over 24,000 children are currently being educated in Integrated schools in Northern Ireland (over 7% of the total school population).¹⁸ In the 2020/21 school year there were 45 Integrated primary schools and 20 Integrated post primary colleges.¹⁹

2.2.3 The Principles of Integrated Education

The growth of the Integrated Education movement was not predicated on a belief that the Controlled and Maintained systems were inherently flawed; it was, however, underpinned by the belief that schools should be places where children, supported by trained teachers, could explore their differences safely, as advocated in Allport’s²⁰ contact theory:

“If children are to have a better future, then they must experience new ways of meeting with others.”²¹

The principle was remarkably simple - if the development of sectarian attitudes is more likely where children are separated in an already divided society, then attending school together might help them to get to know one another, to learn to understand and respect diversity and thereby equip them to live in a diverse society.²²

In 1991 NICIE produced a ‘Statement of Principles’; this was reviewed in 2008. The NICIE website states that these principles should be present “in the DNA of [Integrated] schools” and that they should inform all of the schools’ decisions and actions. There are four principles:

- Equality – this is effected by a 40:40:20 (Catholic:Protestant:Other) quota system for pupils and Boards of Governors and the active recruitment of a diverse cohort of teachers.
- Faith and Values – Integrated schools are not secular (e.g. Catholic sacraments are facilitated) and they follow the NI curriculum for Religious Education (drawn up by representatives of four Christian denominations – the Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church) and practice daily ‘collective worship’ as they are legally required to do, but they are committed to accommodating diverse “ideas, practices and beliefs”.
- Parental Involvement – this is described as being a “fundamental element” and there are a greater proportion of parent-Governors on the Boards of Integrated schools than on the Boards of other school types.
- Social Responsibility – this philosophy affirms that Integrated schools are an “all-ability and inclusive... shared civic space”.²³ DE documents that “Integrated education has demonstrated that it can: help break down barriers; develop more positive social attitudes; and nurture and improve community relations among young people.”

2.2.4 The Management and Governance of Integrated Education

The place of Integrated education in peacebuilding was clearly articulated in the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

“An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.”²⁵

Although significant, the above statement was in effect a reiteration of Article 64 of the 1989 Education Order (NI). The Order went on to define arrangements for the establishment, management and governance of two types of Integrated school: ‘Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools’ and ‘Controlled Integrated (CI) schools’ (schools that had previously been Controlled but whose parents had voted for transformation to Integrated status, and had that request approved by the Minister of Education). Transformed schools are, however, entitled to become either GMI or Controlled but, to date, only newly established Integrated schools have chosen the GMI option.²⁶ The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) actively support those school communities that wish to consider transforming to Integrated status, for instance through the “Integrate My School” initiative.²⁷ With the support of parents, all schools in NI are entitled to seek to transform, (with the exception of special schools and schools located in hospitals).

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement>

¹⁸ Department of Education NI (2021) Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2020-21, Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolments-2020-21-statistical-bulletins>

¹⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/integrated-schools#:~:text=There%20are%20at%20present%2065,and%2027%20controlled%20integrated%20schools.>

²⁰ Allport, G. W. (1954). The nature of prejudice. Cambridge/Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley

²¹ Wright, F. (1991) Integrated Education and new beginnings in Northern Ireland, Working paper 6, Belfast, Corrymeela Press; 12

²² Bardon, J. (2009) The Struggle for Shared Schools in Northern Ireland: The History of All Children Together, Belfast, Ulster Historical Foundation.

²³ <https://www.nicie.org/about-us/statement-of-principles/>

²⁴ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Integration%20Works%20-%20Transforming%20your%20School%20December%202017.pdf>

²⁵ British and Irish Governments (1998) The Agreement https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf

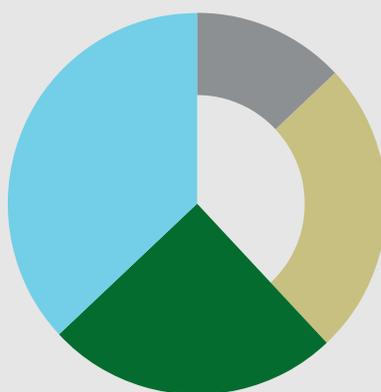
²⁶ The Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland) 1989 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/contents>

²⁷ <https://www.integratemy.school.com/>

Across all school types, voluntary governors are engaged to manage school affairs and to represent the interests of a variety of stakeholders: those who originally founded the school (including Protestant 'Transferors' in Controlled schools and Catholic 'Trustees' in Maintained schools), those who are responsible for funding and managing the education system (the Education Authority (EA) and DE), those whose children attend the school (parent governors) and the school staff (teacher governors).²⁸ The composition of each Board of Governors is determined by the size and sector of each school as laid out in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, and the Education (NI) Order 1997. Controlled Integrated (CI) schools are the only school type that include both Transferor representatives and Trustees on their Board. There is no legal requirement for Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools to have either Transferors or Trustees on their boards – although many do. Both CI and GMI schools actively ensure that their boards have a cross-community composition.

Controlled Integrated Schools (14 or 21)

Grant Maintained Integrated Schools (16 or 24)



Key

	Transferors
	Trustees
	EA Governors
	DE Governors
	Parent Governors
	Foundation Governors
	Teacher Governors

Each GMI school is provided with an annual budget for all running costs (including teacher salaries as the school is the employing authority) by DE. These schools have greater fiscal independence than CI schools. In CI schools EA is the employing and accounting authority and they are allocated funds from within the overall EA school budget.

In a report for the Department of Education, 39 recommendations were made regarding Integrated Education.²⁹ These included regular reporting to the Assembly of the statutory duty of the Department in relation to Integrated schools, a review of the religious balance required in Integrated schools to take account of the increasingly diverse society in NI, a requirement that Development Proposals for closures and amalgamations of schools should give meaningful consideration to other solutions including an Integrated solution, and for all schools to ensure cross-community representation of their staff by ending the exemption for schools from Fair Employment Legislation. Few of the recommendations in the report were implemented.

2.3 What is Shared Education?

2.3.1 Definition

The Education Authority defines Shared Education as:

“Schools from different sectors working in partnership to provide opportunities for pupils, staff and the community to engage in collaborative and meaningful learning experiences.”³⁰

The concept of Shared Education was embedded in legislation in the Shared Education Act of 2016. Section 2.2 of the Act defines Shared Education as:

“The education together of those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.”³¹

Section 3 of the Act places a duty on the Department of Education to “encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education.”³² The language is strikingly similar to that which had been used in the 1989 Act to endorse Integrated Education, but the inclusion of the additional concept of ‘promotion’ suggests a nominally higher status for Shared Education, even though Integrated Education is a management type of individual schools while Shared Education is a concept of collaboration between two or more schools. The 2016 Shared Education Policy³³ includes a subtle redrafting of the commitments that had been made in respect of Integrated Education in previous legislation and in the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

²⁸ Milliken (2020) https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/640563/TEUU-Report-05-Governance-of-Schools.pdf

²⁹ Department of Education NI (DENI) (2017) *The Report of the Independent Review of Education: Integrating Education in Northern Ireland (Topping and Cavanagh Report)*. Available at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Integrating%20Education%20Report.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/shared-education>

³¹ Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/niu/2016/20/contents>

³² Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/niu/2016/20/introduction>

³³ Department of Education (2016) Sharing Works: A policy for shared education <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/24972/1/shared-education-policy.pdf>

“Building on our existing educational structures, Shared Education offers the opportunity to create a more integrated education system in which children and young people from different community backgrounds can be educated together.”³⁴

It would therefore appear that there has been a conscious and deliberate policy move in respect of the place that had been afforded to Integrated Education. Shared Education accepts the reality of a dual system but proposes increased cooperation between schools on either side of the community divide. The concept leaves the divided system untouched and unchallenged, instead schools are encouraged to develop collaborative partnerships to facilitate the regular coming together of students for joint, curriculum-based classes. By placing educational benefits in the foreground and assigning reconciliation outcomes a lower profile, Shared Education attracts schools and parents who were reluctant to engage with previous initiatives.³⁵ Research has shown that such programmes can improve intergroup attitudes and reduce intergroup anxiety.³⁶

Consequently, while both share reconciliation as a desired outcome, Integrated Education and Shared Education represent fundamentally different philosophies and approaches to achieving that.

	Integrated Education	Shared Education
Origins	Parent-led Movement	Legislation and Policy
Motivation	Improved Community Relations	School improvement and collaboration for reconciliation outcomes
Model	Children educated together for all subjects, every day in the same school	Children from two (or more) schools educated together on a specific subject for a limited time.
Nature	Visionary	Pragmatic
Progress	Incremental	Rapid
Funding	State and Charitable/External	External/Charitable and state
Community Relations Impact	Intense impact with relatively small numbers	Moderate impact with large numbers
Sustainability	Good	Uncertain – subject to the continuation of external funding
Advocates	Public opinion Alliance Party Green Party Other political support IEF NICIE	Catholic Council for Maintained Schools Controlled Schools Support Council NI Government – All parties, but especially DUP and Sinn Féin Broad cross-party support

2.3.2 The History of Shared Education

The concept of promoting mutual understanding through bridging work between schools can be traced to the Schools Cultural Studies Project which commenced in 1974 and included primary school exchanges and co-operative post-primary projects. The Community Relations NI Order of 1975 gave the Department of Education responsibility for improving community relations; it is however DENI Circular 1982/21, ‘The Improvement of Community Relations: The Contribution of Schools’ that has been recognised as the seminal document. It stated that:

“Every teacher, every school manager, Board member and trustee, and every educational administrator within the system has a responsibility for helping children to learn to understand and respect each other, and their differing customs and traditions, and of preparing them to live together in harmony in adult life.”

In 1987 the Department of Education introduced a funding scheme for schools seeking to work across the divide and develop joint projects. This was underpinned two years later by the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order (1989), which introduced into the curriculum the educational theme of Education for Mutual Understanding with the aim of “[improving] relationships between people of differing cultural traditions”. The Department of Education devolved responsibility for cross-community funding to the Education and Library Boards in 1996 who introduced the Schools Community Relations Programme.

³⁴ Shared Education Policy <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Sharing%20Works%20A%20Policy%20for%20Shared%20Education%20Sept%202015.PDF>

³⁵ Hughes, J. and Loader, R. (2015) ‘Plugging the gap’: Shared education and the promotion of community relations through schools in Northern Ireland. *British Educational Research Journal* 41(6): 1142–1155.

³⁶ Hughes, J. and Loader, R. (2015)

The advent of a more peaceful society in the wake of the signing of the Agreement prompted a review of schools' community relations programmes to make sure that they were fit for purpose in changed times. The review was conducted in 2001 and 2002 and the resulting report observed that "a major strength of the programme was the continued commitment and dedication of teachers, both personally and professionally."³⁷ The review also noted however that many programmes lacked progression and commented on the "reluctance by teachers to engage in controversial issues."³⁸

The Shared Education Programme (SEP) was launched in 2007 to foster partnerships and collaboration between Controlled and Catholic Maintained schools. The model envisaged both teachers and students moving between schools in order "to take classes on a regular basis [which] would allow for a degree of mixing and contact, while at the same time protecting the ethos and existence of separate schools."³⁹ The initiative was funded by the International Fund for Ireland.

Shared Education was referred to for the first time by the NI Executive in the 2011-15 Programme for Government which included specific objectives relating to Shared Education in support of a commitment to build a strong and shared community – any reference to Integrated Education was conspicuous by its absence. In July the following year the Minister for Education established a Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to report on 'Advancing Shared Education'. The MAG reported in April 2013 and their recommendations were duly accepted by the Minister.

After significant political wrangling the NI Government published a good relations strategy in May 2013: *Together: Building a United Community* (T:BUC). Amongst other commitments, the strategy undertook to remove peace walls, support shared housing and promote cross-community sport. T:BUC also undertook to enhance the quality and extent of Shared Education provision and included a headline action to commence ten new Shared Education campuses by 2018.

Between 2013 and 2015 the Department of Education withdrew funding and wound-up previous statutory funding initiatives for cross-community work between schools. In October 2015 the Minister issued a call for applications to the £25million Shared Education Signature Programme (part financed by Atlantic Philanthropies).⁴⁰ The Department of Education launched "Sharing Works – A Policy for Shared Education"⁴¹ in 2015 – in November of the same year the Shared Education Bill was introduced. The Bill progressed rapidly through Committee and Consideration stages and was passed by the Assembly for Royal Assent on 8th March 2016. In the meantime, in January 2016, a further €35.29million had already been assigned to Shared Education from EU Peace IV funds.⁴²

By June 2019, 61% of Northern Ireland's primary, post primary, and special schools were involved in Shared Education programmes, with approximately one quarter of the pupil population taking part. The Executive's commitment to Shared Education was restated in the "*New Decade, New Approach*"⁴³ document of January 2020 which noted, as part of the priorities agreed by the political parties, that "to help build a shared and integrated society The Executive will support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom."⁴⁴ This statement, however, leaves room for interpretation. It is unclear whether this is an indication of a commitment to Integrated Education or Shared Education or both.

The Shared Education Campus Programme (SEC), while not part of the Shared Education Act (2016), aims to house schools of different types and sectors within a single set of buildings in the understanding that opportunities will be provided through collaboration and sharing of resources but with each school retaining their own ethos and individual identity (e.g. uniforms, school assembly). In March 2016, an additional £50million over ten years was announced for Shared Campuses.⁴⁵ The most prominent project is the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh. This project commenced with the gifting of former Ministry of Defence land to DE in 2011 and aims to eventually bring around 4,000 pupils together from five schools including Controlled, Maintained and Voluntary post primary schools and one Special school. However, while work first began in 2013, there have been significant delays, and only the Special School has relocated. Originally due to open in 2020, in 2017, the completion date was moved to 2021. It was then pushed back to 2022 and, in 2021, moved again to 2025. Costs are rising too, leading to concerns that the project will not ever be completed.⁴⁶

There have been three calls for applications to the SEC Programme but, so far, only five projects have been approved to proceed:

- St Mary's High School and Limavady High School
- Ballycastle High School and Cross & Passion College
- Moy Regional Primary School and St John's Primary School, Moy
- Duneane Primary School, Toomebridge and Moneynick Primary School, Randalstown
- St Mary's Primary School and Brookeborough Primary School

³⁷ O'Connor, U., Hartop, B. & McCully, A. (2002) *A Review of the Schools Community Relations Programme* UNESCO Centre, Coleraine & DENI, Bangor: 39

³⁸ O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 44

³⁹ Gallagher, T. (2016) Shared Education in Northern Ireland: School Collaboration in Divided Societies, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 42, no. 3: 367

⁴⁰ <https://www.deni.gov.uk/news/final-call-applications-%C2%A325million-shared-education-signature-project>

⁴¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Sharing%20Works%20A%20Policy%20for%20Shared%20Education%20Sept%202015.PDF>

⁴² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/education-minister-welcomes-%E2%82%AC3529million-shared-education-peace-iv>

⁴³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Shared%20Education%202nd%20Report%20to%20Assembly%20June%202020.PDF,p.2>

⁴⁵ <https://www.deni.gov.uk/news/ministers-announce-funding-shared-and-integrated-education-phoenix-integrated-ps>

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-58960495>

2.3.3 Principles

Unlike Integrated Education which has a set of core principles endorsed by a collective representative organisation (NICIE), the Shared Education policy outlines a vision of:

“Vibrant, self-improving Shared Education partnerships delivering educational benefits to learners, encouraging the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.”⁴⁷

Thus, Shared Education places ‘educational improvement’ as the principal objective for joint working between schools and, although it is not entirely an afterthought, there is a concern that reconciliation might become a little lost, and “... the challenge faced by shared education is to ensure that the nature of the encounters does not, intentionally or unintentionally, suppress the exploration and critique of differences in identity and experience.”⁴⁸ Indeed, it has been suggested that this is a pragmatic approach given that previous school-based reconciliation initiatives were often short-lived or one-off and were “generally not used to address issues related to conflict or division and often lacked any real ambition to promote change.”⁴⁹ Crucially, research into shared educational practices in Scotland and England has shown these practices to have educational and social benefits, whilst at the same time protecting denominational ethos.⁵⁰

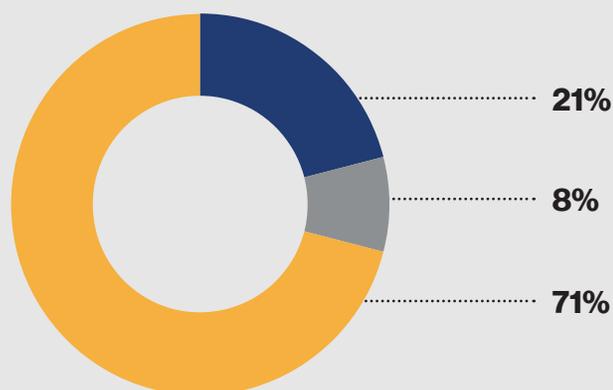
Shared education also aims to prioritise parental choice – for children to attend a school that echoes their family’s beliefs – and to address the concern expressed by some parents that Integrated Education is presented as “the only solution to ethnic/racial divisions.”⁵¹

3 Discussion

3.1 Challenges for Integrated Education

More children are seeking places in Integrated schools than there are places available. In an era of declining school populations, Integrated schools were oversubscribed by 700 in 2019.⁵² A poll conducted in July 2021 recorded that 71% support the model of integrated education for all schools.⁵³ Parents do not however always have free choice – Integrated schools are not evenly distributed throughout Northern Ireland and rural areas are particularly ill-served. Consequently, parents who would wish to send their children to Integrated schools may be unable to do so due to limited places or excessive travel.⁵⁴ Put simply, there is a shortage of Integrated schools. Supply does not meet demand.

Should integrated schools be the main model for our education system?



The creation of a new Integrated school may also be seen as a threat to those schools that are struggling to fill their places – the entry of a new player into an already crowded field. The ‘interloper’ may be unlikely to garner support from families who have attended the same school for many generations.

As documented above there is a suspicion in some quarters that Integrated schools could compromise or dilute the child’s community identity. Integrated schools are not secular. They follow the NI curriculum, have a Christian ethos, and accommodate primary school pupil preparation for Catholic sacraments. Research has shown that Integrated education does not generally lessen the strength of students’ community/religious identity:

“Religious identity was unaffected and there was also little impact on political identity.”⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Hayes, B. et al., (2007) p.460

⁴⁸ Hughes, J., & Loader, R. (2015). ‘Plugging the gap’: Shared education & the promotion of community relations through schools in Northern Ireland. *British Educational Research Journal*, 41 (6), 1142–1155, p.1150.

⁴⁹ Gallagher, T. (2016) Shared Education in Northern Ireland: School Collaboration in Divided Societies, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 42, no. 3

⁵⁰ Blaylock, D. and Hughes, J. (2013) Shared Education Initiatives in Northern Ireland: A Model for Effective Intergroup Contact in Divided Jurisdictions, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, vol. 13, no. 3: 484

⁵¹ Blaylock and Hughes, 477

⁵² <https://www.nicie.org/about-us/who-we-are/the-history-of-nicie/>

⁵³ Manley, J (2021) Survey Finds Increased Support for Integrated Education *Irish News* 3/8/21 <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/08/03/news/survey-finds-increased-support-for-integrated-education-2406757/>

⁵⁴ Roulston, S. and Cook, S. (2021) *Parental choice of primary and post-primary schools: myth or reality?* Transforming Education Briefing Paper #8. Download here: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/809019/TEUU-Report-08-Parental-Choice.pdf

⁵⁵ Hayes, B. et al. (2007) Integrated Education, Intergroup Relations, and Political Identities in Northern Ireland, *Social Problems*, vol. 54, no. 4: 460.

The ruling parties in Northern Ireland are, at best, ambivalent towards the further development of Integrated Education and the largest Unionist/Loyalist party (Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)) and the largest Nationalist/Republican party (Sinn Féin (SF)) have both demonstrated antipathy or ambivalence towards supporting the growth of Integrated Education.⁵⁶ In July 2021 the draft Integrated Education Bill presented to the NI Assembly was criticised as “unwelcome and unhelpful” by the DUP Minister for Education and as “doing nothing to promote Irishness” by a former SF Minister for Education.

It has been suggested that maintaining the separation of school systems may be perceived to be to the long-term benefit of these parties who are seeking to maintain their respective powerbases.⁵⁷ Politically, Integrated Education has traditionally been perceived as being aligned with the Alliance Party who hold only a relatively small number of seats in the Assembly. Without the backing of the ‘Big Two’ (currently the DUP and SF) it is difficult to see how further growth can be achieved.

The 40:40:20 of Catholic, Protestant and Other/None demographic mix that Integrated schools endeavour to create is not reflected in the make-up of many regions of Northern Ireland – there are many urban and rural areas that are numerically and culturally dominated by one side or the other.⁵⁸ Thus, even if every school were to become Integrated tomorrow, the enrolment of a proportion of schools might remain largely unaltered.

Given the large proportion of teachers who have followed a community consistent path throughout their education and teaching careers and, with repeated evidence that many teachers are reluctant to engage with controversial issues in the classroom, it could be argued that it is unrealistic to expect that any type of school system can generate an inclusive and accepting society. Education is just one element of structural community segregation – work is also required to address the relative shortage of mixed housing areas and lack of cross-community co-operation elsewhere in society.

Opinion polls and surveys have consistently found that a majority of parents favour Integrated Education, and wish it to be more widely available in Northern Ireland. This includes polls and surveys undertaken by the media, charities and independent companies. However, sceptics point to the slow growth of Integrated schools, implying that these measures of the public mood are somehow inaccurate. And yet, there are no contrary studies. To suggest that a slowing of the growth of Integrated schools indicates a lack of community support ignores the pressures on Integrated education with political opposition from most sides and lukewarm, at best, support from churches.⁵⁹ The existing educational structures were always open about the threat to their position as numbers attending Integrated schools grew,⁶⁰ and politicians took every opportunity to support ‘their’ schools. Where Integrated education is available, those schools are often oversubscribed so pupils cannot find places.⁶¹ Additionally, there are wide areas of Northern Ireland which have yet to establish any Integrated provision, making it impossible for many learners to choose that option.⁶² As poll after poll and survey after survey indicate support for Integrated education across Northern Ireland's communities, it is increasingly difficult to challenge that public endorsement, even when the media and press releases from official sources combine and confuse Integrated Education with Shared Education.⁶³ While other factors influence school choice including tradition, family links, community loyalty, familiarity and peer behaviour, there is still a clear appetite among the population of Northern Ireland for schools which educate young people together, in the same classrooms, every day.

⁵⁶ Hansson, U. and Roulston, S. (2020) Integrated and Shared Education: Sinn Féin, the Democratic Unionist Party and Educational Change in Northern Ireland. *Policy Futures in Education*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1478210320965060>

⁵⁷ Gray, A-M et al (2019) Peace Monitoring Report #5 NICRC, Belfast <https://www.community-relations.org.uk/sites/crc/files/media-files/NIPMR-5.pdf>

⁵⁸ DE guidance in the Integration Works document requires that schools should attract at least 10% of pupils from the minority community in the first year with a view to increase the proportion to 30% of pupils from minority community over time, reflecting the demography of the area.

⁵⁹ Hansson, U. and Roulston, S. (2020).

⁶⁰ Collins J (1992) Democratic unionist party/Sinn Fein attitudes to integrated educating in Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Religious Education* 14(2): 107-113

⁶¹ Borooh, V.K. and Knox, C., 2013. The contribution of ‘shared education’ to Catholic-Protestant reconciliation in Northern Ireland: a third way? *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(5), pp.925-946, p531.

⁶² Roulston, S. and Cook, S., 2021. *Parental choice of primary and post-primary schools: myth or reality?*

⁶³ Magill, D. (2016) *The Most Political Of Issues; The Reframing of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland* Ulster University MSc dissertation (unpublished)

3.2 Challenges for Shared Education

Shared Education is costly and logistically complex. It generally necessitates the physical movement of students between schools and requires “timetabling and busing arrangements... to make it happen”.⁶⁴ Thus, significant financial investment has been required to establish and support the development of Shared Education. Much of this funding originated from philanthropic concerns and international funders and is time-bound. The Department of Education has recognised that “more work is required [to sustain] the work on Shared Education beyond the lifetime of the current funded projects.”⁶⁵ This may be particularly challenging given the financial constraints that are likely to feature in a post-Covid economic environment.

Being a less radical approach, it has been suggested that Shared Education may facilitate experiences that would not otherwise have any chance of happening and there is some evidence that Shared Education programmes have positively impacted on intergroup attitudes: “a reduction in ingroup bias; greater outgroup trust; reduced anxiety towards the outgroup; more positive feelings when in the company of outgroup members; and more positive outgroup action tendencies”.⁶⁶ There is however also a risk that, by retaining physical and social distance within a managed setting, such encounters may unintentionally endorse sectarian segregation. It has been shown “that divisive issues are rarely addressed during contact” in Shared Educational settings.⁶⁷ The separation of primary level Initial Teacher Education along community lines may contribute to limited opportunities of learning the skills needed in order to engage across the community divide. The plumber who fixes the school toilet can be reasonably expected to have spent significant time learning their trade in a mixed class at a Further Education College – while the teacher may have passed through school and Initial Teacher Education without ever having sat next to a student from the ‘other side’.⁶⁸ If those teachers who have been educated in a culturally encapsulated setting (and others) model the Northern Irish tendency to polite avoidance of controversial issues, then they may actually be educating future generations in how to avoid engaging with the very issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve some degree of inter-community reconciliation.

The Shared Campus (two schools under one roof) solution has been tried elsewhere, in similar conflict affected regions, most notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina where “two different ethnic groups (Bosniak and Croat) attend school in the same building, but are taught under separate administrations, teaching staff, and follow distinct curricula, representing at times competing views of the historical and geopolitical conditions of the country”. Research into this system has concluded that “the continued separation of youth based on ethnicity hinders the education of future generations for democracy.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, it has been suggested that this model may “hinder student achievements, suppress respect for diversity, and fail to foster innovation and collaboration among future generations of citizens and leaders” and that consequently “‘Two schools under one roof’ are producing generations of young people whose identities are founded upon the belief that differences between people are irreconcilable and that divisions in all spheres of life are thus justified, instead of learning about the benefits of living in a diverse society.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Boroah, V. and Knox, C. (2013) The Contribution of ‘Shared Education’ to Catholic–Protestant Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: A Third Way? *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 39, no. 5: 942

⁶⁵ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Shared%20Education%202nd%20Report%20to%20Assembly%20June%202020.PDF>

⁶⁶ Hughes, J. and Loader, R. (2015) Plugging the Gap: Shared Education and the Promotion of Community Relations through Schools in Northern Ireland. *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 41, no. 6 (2015): 1147

⁶⁷ Loader, R. & Hughes, J. (2017) Joining together or pushing apart? Building relationships & exploring difference through shared education in Northern Ireland. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 47:1, 117-134, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2015.1125448

⁶⁸ Milliken, M., Bates, J. & Smith, A. (2020) Education policies & teacher deployment in Northern Ireland: ethnic separation, cultural encapsulation and community cross-over, *British Journal of Educational Studies*. 68, 2, p. 139-160

⁶⁹ Tveit, A.D., Cameron, D.L. and Kovač, V.B., 2014. “Two Schools under one Roof” in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Exploring the challenges of group identity and deliberative values among Bosniak and Croat students. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 66, pp.103-112, p.103.

⁷⁰ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2018) “Two Schools Under One Roof” - The Most Visible Example of Discrimination in Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: p.26

4. Summary and Considerations

Around 93% of children in Northern Ireland attend schools that are largely segregated along religious/ethnic lines. It has been calculated that as much as £1bn may have been spent over the last decade on educational initiatives that seek to address the implications of this segregation.⁷¹

Shared and Integrated Education represent markedly different responses to this state of affairs. Integration has an ideal at its heart; it is organic and parent-led and Integrated Schools form combined communities not reliant on another school to enable reconciliation. On the other-hand Shared Education is a pragmatic response to slow growth of Integrated schooling; while it had its roots in many educational initiatives, it has been developed largely by academics. It is grounded in empirical research and has been endorsed by those at the head of the consociational Executive. Schools involved in Shared Education are reliant on another school to facilitate reconciliation aims.

Integrated schools are initiated and established by parents while Shared Education programmes are promoted and supported by EA, guided by school leaders and endorsed by Boards of Governors – with nominal parental representation.

Integrated and Shared Education are fundamentally different, but they are not necessarily mutually incompatible. Numerous Shared Education programmes feature schools that are Integrated. DE have also suggested that Shared Education may provide a stepping-stone on the path to establishing a fully integrated school.⁷²

The system of education that emerged 100 years ago no longer represents the aspirations and visions held by many.

“Separation has created a long-outdated obstacle to societal healing and progress. Vague notions of religious and cultural supremacy, fed from generation to generation, are now truly at odds with where most people in Northern Ireland are really heading.”⁷³

While Shared Education may have created increased opportunities for closer co-operation and collaboration between schools and their pupils, the divided and divisive structure of education has not been addressed. It is to be hoped that the Independent Review of Education, the members of which were announced in September 2021, will examine the divisions within NI's education provision and recommend action which tackles the outcomes of such divisions in fundamental ways. In turn, political leaders need to step out from behind their respective flags and demonstrate the courage and ambition required to radically change the system - preserving the status quo by shoring up the current system is neither fiscally nor socially prudent.

⁷¹ <https://scopeni.nicva.org/article/time-to-count-the-cost-of-segregated-education>

⁷² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Integration%20Works%20-%20Transforming%20your%20School%20December%202017.pdf>

⁷³ Coney, B. (2021) *Integration in Northern Ireland is making progress, despite gloomy headlines* The Guardian 24 May 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/24/integrationnorthern-ireland-education-culture-sport>



transforming education

Report 13
Published November 2021

**Same Difference?
Shared Education and Integrated Education**



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