

## **Response to the Independent Review of Education**

The paper prepared for consultation gives an accurate analysis of the current educational context, and the challenges to be met in taking forward the new vision for education embodied in the Costelloe Report, the new curriculum and the Entitlement framework.

The underlying values, principles and goals accord with the Shared Future aspirations of Government.

From the point of view of economics, social stability and education fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century the aims of reform are indisputable. It seems to me however that the last paragraph is possibly the most important.

- ◆ Northern Ireland has a poor record of common purpose and this has always depleted the dynamic for action and change.

In 1921 the Roman Catholic Church would not cooperate with the Lynn Committee to discuss a shared education system. In 1998 they made their reluctance clear in the original committee set up to discuss integrated education and the terms of reference then changed to be for integrating education. Even within this context they did not discuss transformation as they see it as irrelevant to them in their mission to provide a place in a catholic school for every catholic child.

Canon Law says it is the responsibility of the parents to educate the children and though custom and practice with regard to church schools vary over the world it is interesting to see that Pope Benedict, in a recent speech in Poland on Interchurch marriage, reiterated the need for the churches 'to fully respect the rights and responsibilities of the spouses for the faith formation of their own family and the

education of their children' .It seems to me that the recent comments of Bishops in NI and CCMS with regard to the role of catholic schools and their fears of the implications of a Shared Future do not accord with the thinking of many Catholics both here and elsewhere.

- ◆ There are numerous examples of planned shared schools from Liverpool to Adelaide in Australia where Catholic bishops have worked with their opposite numbers to set up and run schools together. There are also examples of faith formation taking place through parishes as it does in many protestant traditions.
- ◆ The Catholic bishops are to be congratulated on grasping the nettle of the issue of social justice and selection at 11 and in giving support to the Education Order (NI) 2006.It is possibly through this aspect of the common purpose that confidence may grow to develop a more interactive attitude to collaboration and sharing of facilities and activities. Their response to the Burns report was to create Catholic collegiates where most other people saw them as a way of integrating.
- ◆ The fact that Smith& Gallagher, Burns and Costelloe have researched and been debated has created a climate for change The work of CCEA in developing the new curriculum and the ELBs, RTU and the schools who have prepared its introduction means that there is a cadre of persuaders to enable the sectors to feel confident that the common goal is worth moving into a new collaboration mode and sharing will reap benefits in the form of increased and flexible resources.
- ◆ There has to be one educational body for the full educational continuum with power to provide courageous leadership in conjunction with all those in DE, ELBS, and all the educational bodies who have worked to plan and prepare to this point.

- ◆ It must maintain a strategic vision for inclusive and high quality education throughout NI without duplication and across all sectors. Collaboration and the sharing between schools and FE colleges should be the norm as should community involvement. The communal use of high cost and high maintenance facilities such as swimming pools and playing fields has been developed in some areas through Sports and PE Lottery Funding. This is best use of resources and if well managed can contribute to the integrative objectives.
- ◆ It must develop a sustainable school policy against which to assess provision across all sectors and must be closely linked with the FE colleges. All providers should be a continuum of the same level of teaching and learning and good resources.
- ◆ It must develop a coherent planning and rationalisation process looking at provision in all sectors within the area of a Board or the strategic planning zones.
- ◆ The potential of Strategic Planning Partnerships should be exploited to the full.
- ◆ It must see to the institution of community audits by robust methods before drawing up new housing or town development plans, as has been envisaged in TACOTIE
- ◆ Change to the common formula funding mechanism must be implemented to encourage cooperation and not penalise it, as mentioned by Minister Angela Smith at the ANIELB conference Oct 2005.. This would include dealing with the difficult question of actual teacher costs which can lead to lack of flexibility. There is going to have to be leeway in this system to allow for creative responses and sometimes rethinking mid stream.

- ◆ In its cross sectoral role it must see that all teacher training takes place in a shared institution so that all teachers in all schools are enabled to educate for diversity and a Shared Future. Within this, personal and professional development should include provision for the exploration of attitudes and experiences that might block capacity to work with children from all backgrounds and lead unwittingly to sectarian or racist comments or approaches. Stress about leaving old certainties must be sympathetically handled. This is part of the BELB policy on Integrating Education adopted in 2000 in response to Culture of Tolerance and the Education for Diversity document which followed.
- ◆ All staff at every level need to be aware of the need to challenge stereotypes appropriately. People must feel safe to be themselves in the new environment.

The Integrated schools have broken the mould of separate education in NI since 1981. They are shared institutions through enrolment and governance.

So why at a time when monies are being made available for other sector schools before this review is done is it seen as acceptable to turn down four planned integrated schools? If there had been a strategy for planning the need for another Integrated post primary college south of Belfast would have been identified many years ago . There could have been a transformation but there is no strategy to promote that or educate people about that by DE or the ELBs as a way of rationalisation or meeting parental demand.

- ◆ There needs to be a proactive education programme about the process, implications and benefits of transformation so that every school can be aware of the possibility and consider providing that option in the area.

- ◆ Numbers in established integrated schools should be reconsidered as they have been capped for enrolment numbers and development for some sixth forms has been made extremely difficult, They serve all the community, are value for money but possibly more so if some of the oversubscribed 500 intake ones could go to 600. Primaries should be allowed double entry where required.
- ◆ They were given utility buildings if they began after 1989 and they need refurbishing. The 1980s schools waited endlessly in mobiles but got better build after. What was an interesting experiment is now a sound and established option and needs to be accommodated accordingly.
- ◆ This demonstrates the need for a proper procurement process with parity for all sectors and the provision of good quality and well designed buildings for all developments to facilitate teaching and learning and provide a safe and well valued environment .

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