

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Integrated Education, HC 373

Wednesday 31 January 2024

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sir Robert Buckland (Chair); Stephen Farry; Mary Kelly Foy; Sir Robert Goodwill; Claire Hanna; Carla Lockhart; Kelly Tolhurst.

Questions 1 – 30

Witnesses

I: Tony Gallagher, Honorary Professor, Queen's University Belfast, Dr Matthew Milliken, and Dr Stephen Roulston.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [\[IED0018\]](#) - Transforming Education Project

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Tony Gallagher, Dr Matthew Milliken and Dr Stephen Roulston.

Chair: This is a meeting of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee. Today, we are starting the first session of our inquiry into integrated education in Northern Ireland.

Before I deal with any relevant declarations of interest, this is the first public meeting that the Committee has had since the sad death of Sir Tony Lloyd, Member for Rochdale, former shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a valued member of this Committee. The Committee marked his life with a minute of silence in our last meeting, but I thought it right to put formally on the record our thanks to Tony for his service, our praise to him for his selfless public example and our deepest condolences to his family, his friends and the wider community, both in Rochdale and in his previous constituency in Manchester, which he served for the balance of 40 years, as well as for his service as a police and crime commissioner in Greater Manchester. He will be much missed by this Committee, and we mourn his passing very deeply indeed.

On a happier note, I am delighted to welcome to the Committee our newest member, Kelly Tolhurst, Member for Rochester and Strood. Welcome, Kelly. It is great to have you as part of our deliberations.

I will now ask for any relevant interests to be declared. There is only one from Carla, who is a governor in numerous schools in Northern Ireland.

Carla Lockhart: That is correct.

Q1 **Chair:** Of course, that is a non-pecuniary role. I am grateful to you, Carla, for that.

If I start off, gentlemen, by bringing all three of you into the conversation to set the scene, how would you characterise the current position with regard to the education system in Northern Ireland?

Dr Milliken: Good morning. Thank you very much for the invitation. Someone once described the education system in Northern Ireland as having Byzantine complexity. Even many of those who work deeply within the system do not fully appreciate and understand its complexity.

The general secretary of the NEU in Northern Ireland described it as the most divided system in the world. That may have been over-egging the pudding, but we divide our children by gender; we still have a great number of girls' schools and boys' schools. We divide our children by class; we have an enduring academic selection process, which ensures that. We divide our children by their ability and their disability—I am sure that the panel are aware of the costs of special educational needs support—and in doing so, we deny mainstream children the opportunity to learn from those with disabilities. We divide our children, very



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obviously, by faith; there are Catholic schools and there are non-denominational state schools, essentially.

It is also important to note that, although we talk about faith and about religious division, it is also, perhaps more importantly, an ethnic division. Although the young people in schools come from identified religious groupings, that is a shorthand; it also identifies nationality, and it identifies, to some extent, the games that are played in that school and the subjects that are taught. The books that appear in the school library differ between Catholic and state schools.

There is a deep divide. That divide is maintained through a structure of systems, of administration, of management and of initial teacher education, which preserve, root and branch, the divide. All of that is funded through the public purse.

Dr Roulston: I agree with everything that Matt has said. He has taken most of it there and shown the divisions perfectly well. I would just add that, despite the divisions, we have a teaching workforce who are really committed and devoted to what they do. We have a first-rate teaching workforce and school leadership, which is also exemplary. All of those who support schools have to be commended as well, but they are working, as Matt has so ably shown, within a very divided system. It is those divisions that are the issue. It is nothing to do with the people who are working within the system.

Professor Gallagher: The main feature of our schools at the moment is the serious crisis that they are in because of over a decade of systematic underfunding, which has been exacerbated in the last couple of years. Schools are facing really significant problems, with many going into deficit positions. Despite that, I would echo Stephen's point that we have a teacher workforce who are deeply committed to the needs and interests of young people and, in extremely difficult circumstances, doing a wonderful job.

It may also be worth saying at this point that there is sometimes a tendency to think that schools and teachers should solve every problem in society. It is unfair to put that burden on schools and teachers. Our teachers and schools in Northern Ireland do wonderful work and do everything that they can to contribute positively to society, but it is a cop-out to assume that everything can be solved by them.

In addition, Matt was making a point about different books and things in schools. That seems to me to be a picture that is maybe truer of the early 1970s than now. If you look at the current evidence on the views and outlooks of young people in Northern Ireland, they are the most tolerant and most liberal age group in Northern Ireland. They are the most welcoming of diversity on a whole range of dimensions. Despite all the challenges, schools seem to me to be doing a very good job at helping young people have a different outlook than perhaps previous generations.



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What is a bit more unfortunate is that young people are very disillusioned with politics, which is a key issue that needs to be thought about. Their views on a whole range of issues related to community relations go up and down, which is strongly related to the state of politics at any particular point in time. Hopefully, events yesterday and over the next few days will help to inject a bit of much needed optimism among young people in the future that they are facing.

Q2 Sir Robert Goodwill: Currently, fewer than 10% of schools are integrated, educating 27,000 students. What assessment have you made of the potential merits of increasing the level of integration in the education system in Northern Ireland? Is it all about surplus places?

Dr Milliken: The integrated movement is 40 years old. The schools that came into existence 40 years ago had to fight for their existence. They were resisted on many sides. In many ways, it is a remarkable achievement that as many as 8% of our children now attend deliberately mixed, integrated schools.

Q3 Sir Robert Goodwill: Were they set up as new schools or were they previous schools that transitioned?

Dr Milliken: There are two types of integrated school. All integrated schools are set up through parental power. A number are set up as new schools; they are referred to as grant-maintained integrated schools. A number of schools that were previously state-controlled schools transform, whereby there is a parental ballot and they elect to move forward as an integrated school and to change their status, while remaining within the management of the controlled sector. They change their boards of governors; they change a number of matters. To date, only one Catholic maintained school has transformed in that way.

It is unusual at this stage, particularly with the funding crisis, to see new grant-maintained integrated schools. The majority of schools that are becoming integrated are those that have previously been managed in another sector and, through a parental ballot, choose to move on, but that process is phenomenally complex in terms of parents—who, frankly, have an interest in that school for only five or seven years and then move on when their children move on—trying to move the school in a different direction to vested institutions that have a commitment to maintaining their control and power over it.

Quite often, parents are very much ahead of the boards of governors in terms of how they see the future of the school that their children attend. That is the complexity and the difficulty in moving a school.

Q4 Sir Robert Goodwill: Just going back to my initial point, do they deliver better education? Certainly from my experience here in England, Catholic schools tend to deliver a very good education, and other schools variably so. Are these integrated schools delivering better education than the segregated schools?



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Dr Milliken: It depends on what you mean by “better”. If you measure schools’ academic performance, the best academic performances are generally found in grammar schools that are managed in the Catholic sector in Northern Ireland. There are also some very high-achieving non-denominational grammar schools in the Northern Irish system.

If you measure the way in which we prepare children for living in a diverse, complex society, with the deliberate and conscious mixing of children in the school setting, where they have an awareness of the difference and that difference is not something that is subsumed, but the ethos of the school encourages its discussion and exploration and carries that diversity and difference as a mantra through the educational process, I would argue that those children are better prepared for life in a complex and diverse society.

Dr Roulston: Again, I have little to add to what Matt has said, but I would just go back to the beginning of the integrated movement, and the audacity and bravery of those parents who set up that first school, which became Lagan College and is one of the most sought-after schools and the most over-subscribed in the Province. They set up the system on their own. They had no funding whatsoever. They were initially in a scout hall. They hired and paid their own teachers out of their own pockets. There was no thought, even, of funding at that stage. Just that sheer audacity has carried that movement through.

Perhaps the biggest risk that they took was putting the lives of their children into this fledgling movement and into a school system that they did not know would have any future. The bravery of those people and those parents continues, and that is what bubbles up in communities that establish integrated schools. It is a movement, almost, rather than a sector of education. It is a movement with a desire to see children being educated together. The outcomes, in the way that Matt kindly articulated before I got to them, in terms of bringing children together and preparing them for a very diverse world, are very important.

Q5 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** They are almost a forerunner of the free schools that, here in England, parents have been allowed to set up if they can get the funding.

Dr Roulston: Yes.

Q6 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** Professor Gallagher, do you have anything to add in terms of the advantages of integrated education?

Professor Gallagher: To echo a point that Matt and Stephen have made, the establishment of the planned integrated schools from 1981 onwards was quite a courageous and brave act in a situation where things were very difficult. A lot of people questioned whether it could be successful. The schools were successful and have thrived, and it is now a well-established and important sector in our school system.



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As you say, currently about 8% of young people go to planned integrated schools. Following legislation that was passed by the Assembly, that proportion is likely to increase over the coming period, although that level of increase is likely to remain quite modest and slow. The most likely source of increase is through transformation, which does produce some challenges, because some schools that transform have difficulty achieving the type of balance in their enrolment that the integrated movement aspires to achieve.

In that respect, the recent recommendations or views coming out of the report of the Independent Review of Education are quite important, because they accepted a strong moral case for more opportunities to be provided for young people in Northern Ireland to work, study and learn together, and to proceed on a range of different fronts at this point so that we can maximise that opportunity. The integrated schools are one very important opportunity to do that. The shared education partnerships, which are also a statutory requirement of the Department of Education, provide an important impetus in this direction as well.

There is a provision for joint faith schools, run jointly by the Catholic Church and one or more of the Protestant Churches, based on models that exist in England and in a number of other places. The procedures for that exist, and there have been discussions that have come close to establishing a joint faith school on a number of occasions, but that have fallen at the last moment. That is an area worthy of exploration, as the Independent Review suggested.

One of the things that has tended to be neglected after the Good Friday/Belfast agreement is that all school sectors and Churches committed themselves to all schools taking in a more diverse intake. That has the potential to be quite important as well, because Northern Irish society has changed since the Good Friday agreement. The proportion of young people who are not identified as either Catholic or Protestant has almost tripled, from about 7% to 18%, so society is becoming more diverse and more complex in different ways.

I recently published a paper analysing the enrolments of schools and suggested that, on that issue of diversity, all schools are facing a challenge, because there has not been as much movement as might have been expected. This is a commitment that they have made, and they should be challenged to try more actively to meet that commitment.

There is general agreement that it is good and proper for young people to have these opportunities to learn, meet and socialise together. There are a variety of ways that that can be achieved, and we should be trying to move on as many fronts as possible to maximise those opportunities for our young people.

Q7 Sir Robert Goodwill: You talked about funding challenges and the problems facing some schools. The current system generates surplus places, which means that schools are less cost-effective. How big a factor



is that? Is that something that might be driving some, particularly rural, communities, where this could be a big issue, to look at more integration?

Professor Gallagher: This is something that the Independent Review had a specific point on, and it is quite important. Matt and Stephen have done some work on this in the past. There are some rural areas where you have two small primary schools, both of which are hovering around or below what the Department determines as viability criteria. That is the sort of situation where, with the appropriate encouragement, support and incentives, it might be possible for those two schools to come together as an integrated or joint faith school.

There have been a number of situations like that, which have been explored but have tended not to work. The reason for that is that the discussions around those sorts of opportunities have not been combined with sufficient investment to encourage parents to move in that direction. In some cases, when there are mergers, not necessarily between schools from separate sectors, they often remain in the old buildings. If you want to encourage these sorts of things to happen, you have to provide incentives and encouragement for them to happen. Otherwise, experience suggests that the discussions do not go very far. You cannot force it. The notion of forced integration is almost an oxymoron.

Q8 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** I certainly have the bruises to show for it. In my constituency of Whitby, we have 42% surplus places because of second homes and holiday cottages. It has all been about bricks and mortar. I know that Dr Milliken said that children are there for only six or seven years, but this is about where their parents and grandparents went, and feeling, "This is our school." We have had a real difficulty in closing a school, when we do not have this overlying religious situation. Dr Milliken, if you get an offer of a brand-new building to replace the two older schools, does that make it more attractive? Is that what has sealed a deal in some cases?

Dr Milliken: Potentially, but also potentially not. The deep adherence of communities to the structures would possibly still endure. In the example where you have a small village with two schools, both of which are liable to close because they are not meeting the Department's sustainability criteria, the options, as Tony has said, for those two schools coming together are, at the moment, restricted to a joint faith school.

Although controlled schools have a large input in the management from what are called the transferrer Churches—the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church, which handed their schools to the state in the 1920s—they are not faith schools. The legislation that exists to allow schools to come together does not meet the current situation.

If one of those schools closes, it merges with a school of the same sector, maybe five miles down the road. What you have is a village that has



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increasingly one cultural identity, because no parents are going to move to that village when there is no school there. If both schools close, the village dies. There is no new life coming into the village. There is a huge community impact from that situation.

If I may come back on something that Tony said about the importance of the shared education programmes, children in an integrated school come in through the door together, they wear the same uniform and they sit alongside each other from 9 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock or half past 3 in the afternoon. They get educated in all of their subjects together and alongside each other.

Our teaching population, particularly in primary schools, come through segregated teaching colleges. One college was set up specifically to provide teachers for the state-controlled schools, and another to provide teachers for Catholic schools. The ethos of those two institutions is considerably different. A large proportion of our teachers are what I have described as culturally encapsulated: they go from a primary school, to a secondary school, to a teaching college, into teaching practice and into teaching in exactly the same sector of their own community, and that happens on both sides. These are the people we are asking to bring children together in a shared education scenario.

The plumber who fixes the toilets in the school is more likely to have sat in a mixed classroom than the teacher who is leading the shared education programme, because plumbing is taught in technical colleges, which are mixed. We are putting an unrealistic expectation on teachers that they can fully engage with some of this diversity.

If I can give you an example of what that looks like in practice, in a previous life I was what they called the EMU man: I looked after education for mutual understanding in one of the statutory education authorities. I was invited to watch two schools coming together, and they visited Mount Stewart. If anyone has been to Northern Ireland, you will know what Mount Stewart is. It was the family home of the Londonderry family, and Lord Londonderry was the architect of the initial Education Act after Northern Ireland came into being in the 1920s.

This bunch of kids were being taken through the house and asked to imagine that they were taking part in a banquet. The two schools had come together. You did not see their school uniforms, so you did not see the division. They were dressed up in Victorian garb; they were being footmen, maids and cooks, and they were being led through the house.

We came into the first room, and we were told about the portrait of Lady so-and-so on that wall, and the portrait of Lord so-and-so on that wall. We were told about the view out to the gardens through the windows. We were told about the beautiful parquet flooring and the woods that had come from all over the world. We were told about the stucco ceiling and the Italian craftsmen who had brought that in.



We were then led into the next room. We looked at the three walls, the ceiling, and the floor. Behind me was the biggest painting of the Battle of the Boyne that I have ever seen that was not on a mural, and it was avoided. Rather than engaging with, "This is what this was, and this is why this was there," it was glossed over.

We went into the next room, and we were given a list of what was in this banquet that these children were preparing. There were vegetables that had been grown on the estate, game that had been hunted on the estate and spices that had been imported from Asia. You could visualise the tables heaving, and I tentatively put up a hand and said, "When was this banquet taking place?" They said, "This is the exact menu from a banquet that took place in this very room in 1848." I waited for someone to say, "What about the fact that there were people starving to death elsewhere in Ireland?" We moved on to the next room without that ever being spoken about.

The danger of a lot of these programmes is that we do not teach children how to engage with diversity; we teach children how to disengage, how to politely avoid the elephant in the room and how not to talk about things, in the way that, to some extent, the teachers, who have been culturally encapsulated, understand is how you get on. That is one of the major difficulties that I see in the continuance of the system as it currently is.

Professor Gallagher: Matt's characterisation of some of this work is a little bit dated. It is certainly true that some of the work that was done in the 1980s and into the early 1990s was very short term. There was a high level of avoidance of difficult and controversial issues and a tendency not to take young people on a longer journey. They had a short-term experience of meeting with young people from other communities, and that was that. Some of the problems that he identified were certainly found in the work of that group, which is why those programmes were eventually abandoned.

One of the advantages of current programmes, particularly around the shared education partnerships, is that schools build permanent relationships in a local area, and young people get opportunities to meet on a regular basis. Some people argue—and I can understand why—that an integrated school provides a stronger context for that to happen. That may well be true, but the important thing is that we want to try to ensure that as many young people as possible, as quickly as possible, get opportunities to engage with one another. Despite what Matt is saying, the evidence of the impact of shared education partnerships is very strong and very positive, and so dismissing it in that way really is not appropriate.

Q9 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** If they are playing different sports, it is more difficult for schools to get involved with each other in the same way as we have heard.



Professor Gallagher: That is a challenge for integrated schools as well, because they provide an entire suite of sports. In some of the shared education partnerships that I have worked with, it has given opportunities for young people to play sports that they previously might not have had an opportunity to.

If Matt is correct about this idea of cultural encapsulation, which certainly he seemed to me to imply, schools and teachers would be incapable of dealing with issues of diversity and controversy. The reality is that they do it all the time. As I said earlier, young people are the most tolerant, the most progressive and the most liberal cohort in Northern Ireland. That has not happened by accident. Teachers are doing a magnificent job in very challenging and difficult circumstances, and it would be a pity to decry the commitment that they have to that work, and to fail to recognise the work that they are doing.

Things have changed a lot in Northern Ireland. We need to accelerate that process of change and to keep that moving forward, but it is important that we recognise what has been achieved and try to encourage it rather than trying to decry it.

Q10 Stephen Farry: What Professor Gallagher said about the issues around EMU reminds me of the famous scene from "Derry Girls", which the wider audience will be familiar with, in terms of that experience. Of course, that was an exaggeration for drama, and we do not necessarily need to rely on it for evidence as such.

On a more serious point, I was previously Minister for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland and did try to reform the teacher training system. As recently as 2015, I remember a protest. I invited some of the protesters in. One young lady said to me that her entire life had been based on single-identity education, that she wanted to go to a single-identity teacher training college and then work in a single-identity school, and that her entire life was perfectly happy in a single-identity world. There are still issues in that regard in terms of how at least some people are approaching this.

I wanted to go into the detail around the Integrated Education Act and ask each of you to do two things. The first is to explain the Act briefly and what it is seeking to do, and the second is to reflect upon how things have gone in terms of implementation of the Act so far and, in particular, how the Department of Education has responded to it in terms of its strategy and action plan.

Dr Roulston: The Integrated Education Act is much wider than before. It puts an additional onus on what the Department ought to do to develop and encourage integrated education. There are features that they did not have to do before and that they are now compelled to do through the Act.

They have produced an action plan, which has been much discussed as being an action plan with no actions within it and has been criticised for that. There is a perception, whether it is true or not, that they are



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somewhat dragging their feet in terms of what they could be doing with integrated education. They have not really embraced what the Act is trying to achieve as fully as those people who would support integrated education would wish them to, and things seem to be moving rather slowly.

Dr Milliken: The Integrated Education Act is one of two pieces of legislation that were passed just at the conclusion of the previous Assembly. The other one was a repeal of the anomaly that I saw in the legislation that allowed schools to discriminate between teachers purely on the basis of their faith. A school board of governors could appoint a teacher to one school and reject someone else, saying that, to use the Northern Irish vernacular, they do not kick with the right foot. That was passed, but it has not fully been taken up. Whether the legislation was not perfectly framed or whether there is an institutional problem, there seems to be a collective dragging of feet to bring both of those pieces of legislation through to fulfilment.

Dr Roulston: We are without an Education Minister and have been for some time, which may be affecting it as well.

Professor Gallagher: The Act is important. It enhances the level of statutory support for integrated education that was originally formulated in an Act in 1989. It includes a number of additional responsibilities on integrated schools, as well as having reasonable numbers of Catholics and Protestants. It also puts a commitment around establishing social diversity in its intake. There is a particular clause in it around a commitment to teach human rights education, which sits a little oddly alongside the statutory curriculum, where that is already something that schools should be doing, so there are a couple of things like that in it.

The progress to date has been slower than many people would have liked, as Matt and Stephen have said. Part of the reason for that is that the Department went through a process to establish a strategy and was trying to identify procedures and processes that could be put in place to make real the statutory support that is in the legislation.

It ran into an issue, which is still under discussion, on how you measure demand for integrated education. We know that there has been opinion poll evidence saying that most people in Northern Ireland would like their children to be taught alongside children from other communities. There has been a consistent level of support for that, even from 1967, when the levels were around two thirds, and that pattern has continued over that entire period.

You sometimes get quite significant figures on expressions of interest for places in integrated schools that come up through local arrangements, but the research carried out by ARC, which is a joint research centre between Queen's and Ulster, found that there was a very weak or limited relationship between opinion poll evidence, expressions of interest and actual enrolment patterns.



Clearly, the issue of demand for integrated education is a little more complicated than simply assuming that everybody wants it and that, therefore, if you open the gates, numbers will flood in. That is what has held up the process so far. The Department is trying to get a handle on how you can more reliably measure demand, and that then allows the possibility of setting realistic and ambitious targets for how the sector might grow and develop into the future.

Q11 Stephen Farry: Before I follow up on that, I should, for the record, while we are talking about teacher training, probably reflect on the fact that both Queen's and Ulster are also providers of teachers and do so in an integrated format. Although Stranmillis has historically serviced the state sector, it would have a much more mixed enrolment than was the case in the past. In doing so, I may just touch briefly on the teacher certificate issue, which overlays with the fair employment issue.

The main point that I want each of you to respond to is this tension between shared and integrated education. I am conscious that we are talking about EMU and shared education in a wider sense, but we have a Shared Education Act that goes back to either 2015 or 2016, if my memory serves me right, which the Department seems to be much more embracing of, partially probably because it was its own legislation as opposed to something that was imposed by the Assembly above it. Could you talk through and explain for the record the core differences between shared and integrated education, both in a qualitative sense and also in terms of the pros and cons?

Professor Gallagher: Shared education developed in the aftermath of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, when research on the impact of educational interventions during the troubles to try to promote reconciliation showed that, although magnificent work was done by teachers and schools, there was limited impact and little evidence of systemic change.

The view that some of us took at the time was that, if you just kept repeating that, you were unlikely to change things very significantly. In the new context provided by the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, it was important to try to maximise the impact that education could make to underpinning the peace that we were then beginning to enjoy.

The idea of shared education was to try to see whether we could develop effective partnerships of schools in local areas where Catholic, Protestant and integrated schools would come together, students would move between schools to take classes, and teachers would work together in professional learning communities. Part of the way in which the Department eventually engaged with this, from the 2016 Act onwards, was as a result of quite a lot of work done in pilot programmes to try to establish effective models for collaboration, so that there was a clear platform to work from.



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Up until just before covid, about two thirds of schools in Northern Ireland were involved in shared education partnerships of some kind. There is absolutely no doubt that some were stronger than others. Creating opportunities for young people to engage with difficult issues is challenging, given that we still have a road to travel there and we are still learning how to address those things properly.

I do not think that there is a tension between shared and integrated education. Some people have cast them as two different ways forward. They are all part of a wider suite of activities that we should be doing, working on as many practical strands as possible to provide opportunities for young people to come together, study together and learn together.

The main difference between the shared education partnership idea and an integrated school is that an integrated school is a school in and of itself that sets out, at least originally, to get a particular balance in its intake. The shared education idea, based on social network principles, is trying to do it in local areas. Teachers in any individual school would see themselves as having some degree of responsibility for all of the young people in their area, not just those in their school. Since schools are really important civic institutions, if they can demonstrate that capacity to work together collaboratively in partnership, that not only has an impact on the young people and on the teachers—there is plenty of evidence of that—but also has the potential for significant impact on local communities.

Integrated schools have always been and always will be a key part of shared education partnerships. There is a strong likelihood that, in some cases, and perhaps in many cases at some point in the future—who knows?—schools that have been working together collaboratively may decide that they can take a step further and become integrated schools. I do not want to prescribe that future. That is something that we should leave to the evolving nature of the system. I do not see a tension between the two. There are healthy connections and relationships. I have many good friends in integrated schools who are very actively involved in shared education partnerships and bring something really important to those partnerships, so that is really important and really good.

Dr Milliken: Tony has framed it well in terms of the difference between shared and integrated education. Integrated education was specifically mentioned in the Good Friday agreement, but shared education became visible only in policy documents after New Decade, New Approach, which had lifted some of the lines around integrated education and substituted the word “shared” in shared education. “Shared” was a more palatable option within our deeply divided system. It invested money in bringing schools together, as Tony has described, but it did not fundamentally change the silos that were already in existence for the administration.

As I said, the public purse bankrolls a number of arm’s length bodies and other support bodies that are aligned within that sectarian divide—



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schools on the Catholic side or those on the Protestant, state side. Those silos prevent the development of a single system, so money is being poured in to support those systems, and then additional money is being poured in to patch up the divide that has been created by keeping them separate. To my mind, there is a complexity and confusion in that that does not seem to make sense. They are trying to patch a colander with monies for shared education programmes.

In terms of the vision that schools, after they have been working together, will come together perhaps as a single entity, there is no legislation that will enable that to happen. There is a concept whereby schools could be federal schools, with federations of schools in a village such that I talked about earlier, with one from one tradition and one from the other. One could look after P1-3, or years 1-3, and the other years, 4-7. They would be managed jointly by a federal board that looked after all of the schools. At the moment, we have the bizarre situation that you have a rural primary school with perhaps three teachers and a board of governors that has 10 members. There is a lot of mismatch going on, and they sometimes struggle to fill those places.

In terms of the progress and the difference between the two, the integrated school is integrated by design, by ethos and by intent. The shared education model leaves those silos unaffected, and the system continues as was and as has been.

Dr Roulston: I agree with much of what Tony has said about the positive impact of shared education. Both Matt and I have alluded to and talked about this, and have praised shared education for what it has achieved. I have seen some remarkable shared education initiatives in various schools that are really inspiring, but I am not sure that I buy the idea that shared education is a route towards integration.

For a lot of people, it is a destination in itself. If it is a destination, it is enough that we have sharing and we do not need to change the structural deficiencies and the silos in the system that Matt has alluded to. If some people view shared education in that way—and while I do not believe that Tony does, others have taken it as a way out of making fundamental change—then that is an issue.

Just to go back—hopefully not too far back—in the conversation, Tony was talking about the impact of shared education. A colleague of his, Rebecca Loader, wrote a paper in 2022 looking at intergroup boundaries and the divisions between people. She said that some shared education initiatives, depending on how they are run, can increase those boundaries rather than help to break them down.

If somebody comes from another school, and they are sitting on one side of the classroom, not involved and not engaged, it can reinforce those intergroup boundaries. She conceded at the end that shared education, even if it has a modest difference, should be retained, so she was conceding that shared education still had a value, but it is not necessarily



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the case that, if you bring people in for a short term and teach them together, you will have that fundamental change.

I would emphasise that Matt and I do not represent the integrated movement at all. We are independent researchers. In my view, the integrated movement would have a much better chance of effecting long-term differences in young people than even the best examples that I have seen of shared education would.

Carla Lockhart: Dr Milliken, your characterisation of rural schools and that throwaway comment of three teachers and 10 governors is quite unfair. Those rural schools are a key part of those rural communities, and it would be remiss of me not to push back on that very throwaway comment that this could be much better. Those rural schools are excellent in what they do and, if there are 10 governors associated with that school, that is great, because there are 10 people in that community who wish to see that school advance and progress. I just wanted to put that marker down.

Q12 Mary Kelly Foy: Good morning. I have a couple of questions about assessing the demand for integrated schools. Department of Education data shows that, although there is growth in primary schools transferring, it seems that it is not consistent in terms of demand for post-primary schools, where 55% of those in the primary sector are not choosing the integrated school as their first preference. Some of those schools are under-subscribed by 35% or more. What methodologies are being used to assess the demand? How could other drivers, such as a school's performance, ethos or location, be a part of that demand? What is the change once you are post primary? Why are parents not choosing integrated schools?

Dr Roulston: As Tony has alluded to, there are polls that consistently say, "We want more integrated schools." There was one in 2018 that said that 69% of people in Northern Ireland polled wanted all schools to be integrated. The demand is there but, as you say, they do not appear to be taking up opportunities for integrated education, and there are a number of reasons for that.

I recently did a piece of work with a colleague, Sally Cook, and we looked at where integrated schools are found. There are vast areas of Northern Ireland where it is not possible for you to attend an integrated school as a pupil. You have no choice of an integrated school. You are much too far away from an integrated school. The possibility is there for that community to create an integrated school. That is horrendously difficult and challenging, and takes a long period of time, during which you, as a parent, may lose interest in education, because your children have moved on.

For quite a high proportion of people in Northern Ireland, integrated schooling is not even a possibility for them, no matter how much they desire it. That is particularly so in post-primary schools. There are more



primary schools, so they are relatively easier to access. In County Fermanagh, for example, there is one post-primary school, in the county town of Enniskillen. If you live in the remoter parts of County Fermanagh, you can attend neither a primary nor a post-primary integrated school in that particular instance. That might explain some of the reasons why there is a drop-off in post primary.

Q13 Mary Kelly Foy: There are 10 post-primary schools that are under-subscribed, so there must be children living in that area who could choose that as their school.

Dr Roulston: That is a different matter. In many of our towns, we have an excess of choice, which perhaps goes back to the excess of places that are there. There are small towns in Northern Ireland that have five schools—a Catholic selective or grammar school, a Protestant grammar school, a non-selective Protestant school, a non-selective Catholic school and an integrated school. Five schools in a very small rural town might explain why some of these schools are under-subscribed.

Professor Gallagher: As I said earlier, one of the first things that the Department did after the legislation to try to take the issue forward was to commission some research from ARK to look at different ways of measuring demand, and the relationship between these different measures and enrolment patterns. The ARK report found that this is a very complicated situation. The evidence that has been submitted to the Committee from the Governing Bodies Association has also made some quite interesting and important points about patterns of over and under-subscription to schools that would be worth taking a look at.

The problem with using opinion polls is that, when a parent is making a choice about a school for their child, they are not simply thinking of a category of school and deciding that that is where they want to send their child. They are looking at a range of schools in their local area and deciding which they think is the best for their child, so local reputation becomes important.

In some areas, the local reputation of the integrated schools is very high, and Lagan and Hazelwood are two particularly good examples of that. They are consistently over-subscribed, with large numbers of parents trying to get their children in. There are other areas where that is not the case, and the local reputation encourages parents to try to get their children into other schools.

The choice that a parent is making for their child is based on local circumstances, even though the response in an opinion poll might be a bit more of a wider aspirational type of issue. That is where the complications come in.

In terms of what the Department is doing—and they will be coming before you at some point—they are trying to look in more detail at how you can deal with this supply and demand issue and measure it in a way



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that is reliable in order to allow for more accurate and reliable base planning into the future.

Dr Milliken: If I may respond to Ms Lockhart, I had no intention of impugning the quality of rural primary schools. It was simply a proportionality question of how we go about managing schools. It was in no way a critique of the quality of schools.

It is also important to note that, when you move from primary to post primary, we still have an enduring transfer test. We still measure schools by what A-levels and what O-levels they get. Do pupils get to university from that school? A lot of parents whose children are at age 11 have their eyes set on a horizon that is seven years down the line. They want their child to go to university and so forth.

That is not to say that a child going to an integrated school could not or would not reach that, but there has been a tradition that grammar schools have been a more effective route in there than any other types of schools. However, because there has been a dip in population, grammar schools have widened their enrolment criteria, so they keep bringing in the same number of pupils, often to the detriment of other types of schools. One of the enduring issues facing Northern Ireland is the process of selection.

There is also, as has been spoken about, a great loyalty to schools. The desire to attend the school that your daddy or your mummy went to, that all your friends are going to, or that has a good reputation for Gaelic sports or for rugby or whatever, is a furtherance of the division.

Q14 **Mary Kelly Foy:** It must be quite frustrating if you have spent your primary years in that integrated setting and then maybe go to a Catholic or Protestant school.

Dr Milliken: I have heard from a great many parents who say, "Our children play together in nursery and in the local play group, and then they say, 'Why is Sean or Jimmy wearing a different coloured sweatshirt now? Why do they not go to the same school as me?'"

Q15 **Kelly Tolhurst:** I have really enjoyed listening to what you have all been saying this morning. It is really interesting. I used to be the education improvement elected member at my local council when we were going through the academisation process, and some of the issues or points that you have raised are common across the piece, even in a constituency like mine, where there is change and that integration.

On that point, I would just like to get some further information, and Dr Roulston touched on this. Since September 2021, seven schools have transformed to controlled integrated status. I understand that, prior to that, there had not been any for five years. How would you characterise the transformation process to integrated status for schools? What are some of the barriers and the lengths of time?



Dr Roulston: You are absolutely right that it has been slow. Tony has referred to the very slow growth of integrated education, much to the frustration of those who would wish to see it grow more quickly. There is evidence that it is changing. There have been more parental ballots than ever before, which have been successful in saying, "Our school wants to change to integrated status". The very largest school in Northern Ireland, Bangor Academy, had a parental ballot that was successful recently, so there does seem to be a groundswell of change towards integration, which I do not remember seeing before. I am not suggesting that it will change overnight, but there does seem to be a sea change in how integration is being viewed by some parents, by some communities and by some schools and governors.

It may be that that will herald a spurt in the number of integrated schools, but we still have a way to go. As Matt said right at the beginning, we are talking about a fundamentally divided society here. That has not gone away. Those divisions remain and those divisions are very strong, particularly in some communities.

I have done some work recently in border communities, north and south, looking at the primary school provision in those communities. Those communities suffered particularly deeply during the troubles. They are very divided communities. They are communities that are often declining in numbers. Their schools are very often close to being unsustainable. The logic coming to them from outside is that they would be far better off with one primary school serving the whole community, which would enable them to keep school provision in that area. The chance of that happening in those particular communities is probably even lower than it is in other communities.

There are real challenges to transformation and to getting communities to come together to say, "We want to change our system of education. We want our school to become an integrated school." There are challenges in terms of the practicalities of it, but there are also challenges in bringing communities together. That will continue to be a problem, despite the optimism you might see in an increased number of ballots suggesting they want to transform.

Q16 **Kelly Tolhurst:** Earlier on you said that, in some areas, it would never be an option for children to be able to attend one of the integrated schools. I just want to try to dig a little bit more. You said that it was difficult and took a long time. Is that purely referring to what you have described or, once you get the parental ballot, is the process to move to integration unwieldy or difficult?

Dr Roulston: It is not easy. It is not straightforward for them. There are a number of hurdles that have to be gone through, perhaps rightly so. There should be some care in terms of establishing a new form of education that is going to be acceptable for everybody in the community. It is probably not going to be acceptable for everybody in the community, but it will carry most of the community with it.



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It is still very unwieldy, perhaps more unwieldy than it need be. If there is a groundswell of support that can be measured—Tony has pointed to the crucial nature of ensuring that it can be measured and measured properly, and to the challenges of that—steps could certainly be taken to make it a bit more straightforward for communities to achieve integrated status.

As a parent, if my child is in primary 1 in Northern Ireland—we have seven years of primary school, so it goes from primary 1 to primary 7—it could very easily be primary 7 before we achieve any change for my school. That is not going to be any use to me. If I want an integrated education for my child, that is too slow. There could be steps made to make that process much more straightforward.

Dr Milliken: There are a number of issues that muddy the water as well. A small number of schools that are threatened with closure have something of a deathbed conversion and apply for integrated status. They see it as a way of trying to survive.

As Tony has already identified, Northern Ireland is very deeply divided. Communities are very deeply divided. There are villages and areas where, quite frankly, you would have to look very hard to find somebody from the other side to try to create those numbers. It is not always possible, simply by demography, to create a school that has a mixed intake.

The other thing is that, even for a controlled school that transforms into an integrated school, it is not unusual to have a board of governors, a staff team and a body of students that are all drawn from the same community. In an integrated school, you have a mixed board of governors, a mixed staff team and a mixed cohort of pupils.

While you can bring in new governors to get that balance and you can attract new pupils, the process of changing the staff team is much slower. When teachers have been brought up in a certain way of thinking and a certain way of operating, the transformation for them to becoming an integrated teacher is much more complex, particularly if they have been brought up in the cultural encapsulation that I have described.

Professor Gallagher: Very quickly, Stephen made a point earlier about the transformation process being quite long and drawn-out. He is right. If the Department is not looking at this, it should be. It should be looking at ways of creating a transformation process that can occur with greater speed.

Matt is also correct: one of the challenges for transformation is that sometimes, when a school transforms, it has great difficulty in achieving balance in its enrolments. Going back to my earlier point about the report of the Independent Review of Education, that is why it is important to pursue the goal of giving young people the opportunity to study and learn



together on as wide a range of fronts as possible, rather than putting all our eggs in one basket.

The point is being made that we remain a deeply divided society, and that is true. Just to reinforce a point that I made earlier, all the evidence suggests that the most important factors in that continuing challenge around division are political. People are looking to the state of politics and the actions of our politicians, rather than the state of our schools, as one of the key factors in the levels of optimism or pessimism that they have about where we are going as a society. That is why, again, the events of the last day or two and over the next couple of days have the potential to add another optimistic boost in people's perception of what is possible for us to do.

Schools are doing great things, but do not expect them to do everything. Do not put the burden of change in every aspect of our society on to the shoulders of our teachers. They are already doing magnificent work. Let us celebrate that and support them in every way we can so they can do more of it.

Q17 Claire Hanna: It has been a really interesting session. I want to ask you about the findings of the recently published report of the Independent Review of Education and specifically about integrated education. Just to pick up on one of those tracks, the review quite sensibly suggests that we should pursue integration and sharing and try to increase diversity within schools. That seems to be a sensible way to get to where we want to go from where we are and to address some of the realities.

Something that has not really come up is the issue around housing and the relationship with schooling. Bluntly, if everybody in the estate or the village is of a similar background, it makes it difficult to integrate. It is important to be open and honest about that when we characterise the decisions people make about their education.

It is a tough world out there, and parents want a convenient school. It is important that we do not characterise those decisions as people wanting to be isolated, sectarian or anything like it. People are attracted to excellent local education, and often the crest over the door is not their first consideration.

I want to get your analysis of the review in general and talk about the ways in which we can, first, get a more diverse intake in schools that are not currently integrated, and, secondly, how we can acknowledge those schools that are not currently integrated but do have a very diverse intake, which includes many schools in my constituency. Because of the integrated nature of housing, very many schools do meet the ratios—in fact, more so than some schools that are formally integrated. It is important that they are not dismissed and denigrated.

How do we improve the diversity within schools, including things like feeder schools and some of those pathways? Quite simply, if you do not go to an integrated nursery, you cannot get into the integrated primary



and you cannot get into the integrated post-primary or whatever. What measures can we take to do those two things, and what is your general analysis of the findings?

Professor Gallagher: I would agree with you that having a wide range of initiatives is the way to go. The report that I recently published looked at the specific issue of the diversity of schools. It suggested that, in Catholic schools in particular, there was not much evidence of change in terms of the diversity of the schools.

In the schools that traditionally have had a relationship with the Protestant Churches or have traditionally taken a largely Protestant intake, there has been significant change, but the change is a reduction in the proportion of pupils identifying as Protestant and an increase in the proportion of pupils identifying as neither Catholic nor Protestant.

That “other” category is a bit of a mixed bag at the moment because of the way the Department collects the data, although it seems to be largely a consequence of secularism. Most of the people in that “other” category are people who probably 25 or 30 years ago would have identified as Protestant.

Given that the Churches and the different sectors have made a formal public commitment to be more welcoming, to be inclusive and to want to attract a wider and more diverse intake, there is a challenge for them in what they are doing. When they say they want to be more welcoming and inclusive, I believe that they mean it. I do not think it is not intentional. They need to move beyond rhetoric to formal action to try to make that happen.

There is a variety of ways in which that could be done. My report has suggested that some areas of the curriculum could be looked at. We have a religious education curriculum that is not specifically denominational but allows such a high degree of choice that schools can take denominational or community-related choices in what they are providing. We should look at that.

There is a difference between religious education, which is largely about religious instruction, and providing young people with information and access to the notion of faith on a much wider, global conspectus. We could look at that.

There is the possibility of providing religious education, if it is going to be provided at all, at the beginning or end of the day so that parents who want their children to opt out of those classes can very easily and practically do so.

We have quite a good history curriculum, particularly for pupils aged 14 to 16, but it is not a compulsory subject at that age. That is unfortunate. We have an excellent citizenship curriculum, but unfortunately that is the lowest status subject on the curriculum. There are areas of the



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curriculum that we could proactively try to boost in terms of their significance and the role they play.

All our schools should proactively try to create a more diverse teacher workforce as part of a contribution to this process. They should look reflectively at aspects of their own practice and ethos to try to identify any unintentional barriers that may be putting people off from going to schools.

There are things they could do. They have made the commitment. They have restated that commitment in recent days, and we should try to hold that challenge up to them to say, "Okay, we believe you mean it. Now let us see some action to see whether we can shift some of the numbers a little bit and make that situation happen."

It has happened in other countries. I was part of a commission that the Catholic bishops established shortly after the Good Friday/Belfast agreement to look at many of these sorts of issues. One of the examples is Catholic schools in the Netherlands and South Africa. They changed their intake, ethos and practice. This is a challenge going into the future, and it is worth talking with the sectors whenever they come to talk to you.

Q18 Claire Hanna: Dr Roulston, I want to ask you the same question. What is your assessment of the findings in general? How do we improve diversity in some schools, and how do we recognise diversity in schools that are not formally integrated?

You mentioned Bangor Academy, which is a school I have been to a few times. It is a great school. It did not become non-sectarian at the flip of a switch when it became integrated. It was already putting a lot of that into practice. How can we acknowledge that in schools that are trying really hard?

Dr Roulston: You are quite right to acknowledge and celebrate those schools that have already achieved a degree of integration without being integrated. The challenge for such schools, though, is a little bit like Tony referred to earlier on about transformed schools. If you transform from a controlled school into an integrated school, there is a controlled ethos that you have to try to transform along with the formal transformation into integrated status. You have to take your workforce with you, the parents with you and your board of governors with you.

It is a little bit like that in those naturally integrated schools, as they are sometimes described, which are not formally integrated but have a mixed intake. They may have a mixed intake—I attended such a school myself—but the intake is within a particular sector. They will not offer a variety of sports, for example, to the minority within that school. They may not offer the choices within the curriculum that Tony just referred to, to meet the needs of that particular group or indeed address the differences that exist between them.



Integrated schools should—they may not all achieve this—make use of the fact they have a diverse intake, to address difference. They need to ensure they do not follow that culture of avoidance that we talked about earlier on, and to put front and centre the fact that there are differences between the people in this classroom. What can we learn from each other? What do we understand from each other? How can we develop that understanding and that degree of knowledge of the other to make changes in society, ultimately?

Some of the mixed schools may not make use of those opportunities in much the same way. That is not to say they are not doing a great job. It is great that they are naturally mixed, but some of that, as you say, is just to do with the housing in the area. It may be that it is not within the ethos of the school really to address that difference. *[Interruption.]* You are disagreeing with me.

Claire Hanna: No, I am not. It is about recognising the efforts that are made. You are right that sometimes it is just naturally the market they are in and who is nearby. There are schools that people opt into that are addressing this culture of avoidance. I am a parent of children who have been in different sectors. I do not recognise so much the idea that schools are refusing to deal with hard things. It is maybe a conversation for another day. Dr Milliken, I will ask you the same questions.

Dr Milliken: Uncharacteristically, I find myself 100% agreeing with Tony this morning. Everything Tony has said is right. We need to make our existing schools much more porous. We need to look at the perspective of those that are not attending and say, “Why aren’t you coming through the door? What are the barriers that make this school seem inhospitable to your community?”

That involves making our boards of governors and staff teams more diverse. It involves looking at the way we manage and administer our schools in order to ensure that that is happening.

If I can take a little bit of an issue about these naturally mixed schools, a pupil that goes in through the gates of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution is going through the gates of a school with the word “Royal” in it. That is just a random example.

Claire Hanna: They will be walking up Royal Avenue to do it.

Dr Milliken: There is a crown on their uniform. They sing the national anthem at the end of prize day. On Armistice Day, the cadets parade in the school quad. There is a culture that is deep within the school.

Q19 **Claire Hanna:** I was in that very school yesterday doing a Q&A with boys in fifth year. The diversity of thought, in terms of the questions I got and the responses I received, indicated that it is not homogenous. I appreciate your points about the trappings and the sensitivity, but we are almost coming back on ourselves in terms of those issues.



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Dr Milliken: That school was actually set up by United Irishmen; it was set up as a dissenting school. The traditions of these places can change. That is what I am saying. A school that has moved in one direction can, with support, move again. It is not embedded in stone. It is not stuck.

Claire Hanna: Maybe we cannot get into the details, but with some of those practices, yes, you are right, about keeping traditions but broadening and make sure they are not exclusive. There are some issues around feeder schools, for example. There are Catholic schools that specify feeder schools, which does not allow somebody to come from an integrated or a controlled school. As you say, there are cultural barriers to some.

We need to get to a point where we can acknowledge the benefits of having formal integrated status, but those 8% of children are not the only ones who are learning together. We depress ourselves if we imply that everybody else is getting together to be sectarian all day. There is a lot of change in our society that is reflected in all sorts of schools.

Jim Shannon: Ladies and gentlemen, first of all let me apologise for not being here in time. I am sorry. It is just one of those mornings. I got caught up in things and I could not get away, unfortunately.

I am very supportive of what you do and the society that you are trying to create. I have six grandchildren. One attends Kircubbin Integrated Primary School and the big one, Katie, attends Strangford College. That is a choice that my son and his wife made, and it is one that I support as well, though it is ultimately their choice.

My three boys—incidentally, married men now—all attended Glastry College, where I have been on the board of governors for 46 years. I remember coming back from my honeymoon and they were surprised to see me arriving for the board of governors meeting. Anyway, I have been there for a long time. The society that I live in, and the constituency that I represent, already understand the way that education can work together. We can have Catholic-controlled maintained schools, and we can have state schools.

As one who attended Coleraine Academical Institution for some six years and remembers it well, I understand that there are different streams of education. As an MP, my duty is to help every school and every person who comes to me. I have been very supportive of getting the integrated primary school in Ballynahinch. I worked on that along with Mrs Marshall, and it has been a really good story. After the meetings and the long times we had, we got it.

The principal of Strangford Integrated College in Carrowdore, Clare Foster, is a lovely principal who does a great job and gives a lot of leadership. They are going to have a new school starting later this year. Again, in my role as an MP, I have been supportive of what they are doing to try to achieve that.



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On Friday past, incidentally, Loughries Integrated Primary School invited me down to their assembly. I remember when Loughries Primary School's numbers were falling and they were looking for a way forward. They applied and were accepted to become an integrated primary school. That has definitely been their saviour. They now have 89 or 90 pupils. At one time they were down to about 50. Again, there is a lovely atmosphere there. It creates a good atmosphere.

As one who always looks to see what schools do with family and pastoral care, I was really impressed by Loughries Integrated Primary School's pastoral care for their children all across—

Chair: Jim, you are in danger of becoming a fourth panel member here. It is fascinating; it is really good. I am sorry to focus you.

Q20 **Jim Shannon:** Apologies. You are absolutely right. There is one thing that I would like to see, and maybe you will give me your thoughts on it. When it comes to sixth form, Glashury College—I sit on the board of governors—cannot produce all the subject matters for sixth-form students. Movilla cannot and St Columba's in Portaferry cannot either. I believe they should try to work better together.

At long last—Mr Chairman, apologies—I will ask my question. How do you see the three strands of education working together? I am a believer in that, by the way. I can see it as a person who very clearly supports state education. I see the good points of it. How can we do better together?

Chair: Who would like to come in on that summation?

Professor Gallagher: The idea of trying to create integrated or joint sixth forms in some local areas has a lot of merit. It is one of the ideas that was highlighted in the report of the Independent Review of Education as a possibility, with a series of local schools from different sectors all feeding students into a joint sixth form. That would also create a connector between all those schools in that area and encourage them to work together collaboratively as part of the broader process.

It also opens up the potential of trying to connect into further education colleges. They are a really important part of the education system. When we talk about education, we are often talking about schools; we need to think about the education system as a whole. We should be thinking about FE colleges alongside sixth-form colleges. That is a model that is used in many European countries.

There is really interesting potential in that, but it will require a bit of clear thinking and strategic planning by the Department and the new Minister, if we want to move in that direction.

The only downside is that there is plenty of evidence from other places that increasing the number of transitions between schools creates an extra level of risk in terms of young people's educational experience. That



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is the only caveat. You do not want to have young people shifting school too many times.

With that said, the idea of shared sixth-form colleges is something that the late Bishop Edward Daly suggested many years ago over in the west of Northern Ireland. He could not get support for it, but it is an idea with merit whose time perhaps has come.

Q21 Jim Shannon: Tony, very quickly on that point, South Eastern Regional College would be another suggestion. They have a four-pronged thing. It is not a matter of moving schools, Tony. For instance, Strangford College could do French and German; Glashury could do mathematics and English; Movilla and other schools like St Columba's in Portaferry could do something different.

You might have to do a bit of travelling, but it is a good way of integrating all the strands of education. The job of education, as you know, Tony, is to produce the adults of tomorrow and give them experiences. That is what it is about. It is not about changing schools. It is about how they can feel better together.

Professor Gallagher: There are many examples in shared education partnerships of that type of wider provision of a curriculum being made possible because schools are working together. The idea of a sixth-form college is taking that to another level. It does merit consideration. In some areas it might be popular because of the scope and range of experience and opportunity it can provide for young people. I would not rule it out entirely.

What you are saying is perfectly correct. That is happening at the moment. It has expanded opportunities for young people, and that is a good thing. Looking over the next 20, 30, 40 or 50 years, we will want to think about how we can enhance those sorts of opportunities. Having sixth-form colleges in some areas is potentially one way of doing that.

Dr Milliken: I know the area that you are talking about well. The first problem I foresee in that is you will have students on buses travelling relatively long distances. It is a fair whack from Movilla to St Columba's. You will be putting pupils on buses for long distances to attend short periods. They will have a 35 or 40-minute period; they might have a double period. That is the way that sixth forms, grammar schools and post-primary schools work.

A few years ago I might have suggested that we could do it by some sort of virtual learning mechanism and have it all online. If nothing else, covid taught us that, quite often, education is about who you are sitting beside and not simply the subject you are being taught.

Taking up another theme of Tony's—education and its wider concept—one of the things that was missing in the education review, and it is missing here, is the social education that is provided by the Youth Service, which in Northern Ireland is identified clearly as educational



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provision. Youth work is within the terms of the Education Act. The Education Authority is required to provide an acceptable youth service.

It is about having a wraparound service. It is about serving the whole of the community with all those services, including technical colleges. It is a tricky one. There is not a simple one size fits all, but I am very much attracted to this concept of a technical college or sixth-form centre that serves all young people. That is probably a more feasible option with less dramatic costs and less impact in terms of students having to travel long distances, having also acknowledged that chopping and changing schools is not a good idea for young people.

Dr Roulston: I would agree with you and Tony. There is enormous merit in having sixth-form provision shared between a number of schools. The alternative is for some of these schools not to have a sixth form.

Tony is quite right. It is not good for young people to have to change schools a number of times. They are not going to have the prospect of staying at the school. They are going to have to go elsewhere in any case, whether it is to a further education college or a grammar school somewhere. The idea of these schools coming together and offering sixth-form provision for their communities has much merit.

While Matt has said that the online experience is imperfect, there could be an element of that in it as well, which would reduce some of the travelling for some of these young people. Certainly, there is merit in sixth-form colleges.

Q22 **Carla Lockhart:** Thank you very much for your presentation. It is very interesting. Some of it I would have to disagree with, and some of it will cause some angst amongst some of the other sectors in Northern Ireland that are doing an exceptional job.

I would direct Dr Milliken and Dr Roulston to look at many of the controlled sector schools across Northern Ireland where there is real integration. It is not forced. It has happened. If I look at my own constituency, I just contacted one of my principals, with whom I work very closely. This is an example of a controlled sector school. They have 500-odd kids, 200 of which have English as an additional language. The pupils speak 21 languages; 34% of them have SEND; and 39% of them are on free school meals. They have 100 staff, and the staff are totally mixed.

It is very important—Claire made this point—to give credit to many of the schools that have naturally integrated. You should also look at ERGS in Fermanagh—Fermanagh has been mentioned. If you think small rural primary schools in Fermanagh are not integrated, I would suggest that you visit them; they are, because of the rurality.

It is important that, as a panel and as a Committee, we look at that wider map of education across Northern Ireland and the really good work that is going on amongst the other sectors as well. Like Jim, I work for all



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sectors: controlled, maintained and integrated. I am currently assisting in trying to get new builds within my own constituency for some of them.

I have no issue, but my key in education is parental choice and the fact that parents should have the ability to choose. Within that, there needs to be fairness. Quite often now in Northern Ireland, because of the new Bill that was passed in the Assembly, there is a feeling of supremacy within the integrated sector, particularly around the allocation of places.

The school that I gave as an example is bursting at the seams. They need additional places. They cannot get them, but integrated schools can. That is really unfair. I would like to get your assessment of that element of fairness.

I would also like you to comment on the school enhancement programme. The controlled sector and many in the maintained sector are waiting for funding. In my opinion—this may be controversial, but that is me—people are deciding to go integrated because they know they will potentially get a new school or additional places. That should not be the ethos of moving towards integrated education. I would like to just get your views on that.

I just wanted you to comment on fairness, preferential treatment and the need to recognise that many schools across Northern Ireland are integrated, even though they have a controlled sector badge or label on them. I am just keen to put that out there.

Dr Milliken: Many schools in Northern Ireland have a mixed intake. That is very different from having an integrated ethos. Many schools have a diversity of pupils. It is the nature of Northern Ireland. Some 5% of pupils are from a non-British or Irish background across the board. It is not unusual to have a school with a diversity of languages.

What I would suggest is that there is an area planning process. As I understand it, the funds available to the Department of Education are finite. They cannot just keep on building schools at the moment. You could have an area where one school is heavily over-subscribed and another school is under-subscribed, but the two schools represent different communities and different traditions.

Logic says that not everyone will get their first choice. Parental choice is important, but not everybody gets their first choice in life. Could we not have a system where we equalise or flatten that off a little bit more, so that not everyone is trying to get into one school and another school is going down, so that the excess is being shared? You cannot just keep on putting more and more portacabins into the school playground.

There needs to be communication between governing bodies and advisory bodies to come up with solutions that make the best use of the school's estate as it currently is, rather than hoping that somehow a wand will be waved and there will be new buildings and a new school will be built.



Q23 **Carla Lockhart:** Why do you think these schools are not integrating children? I really am struggling to follow your logic today. I do not believe you are reflecting the actual reality on the ground in Northern Ireland.

Dr Roulston: There is a distinction, as Matt has tried to explain, between a mixed school and an integrated school.

Q24 **Carla Lockhart:** How?

Dr Roulston: A mixed school, in my view, would have people from very different traditions. We are talking largely not about social class; we are talking about community background. It would have people from different community backgrounds in the same school. Claire asked earlier on about mixed schools; those schools may reflect a particular tradition. They may have that as their ethos.

Q25 **Carla Lockhart:** This goes back to parental choice. How we bring young people and our society together is mixing. It is not forcing integration. It is mixing. That is through sport, music, arts, culture or whatever. I just do not get your logic of why these schools should be—

Dr Roulston: No one is against mixing. If they are mixed within a controlled ethos or a maintained ethos, there is an ethos there that dominates what music, sports and background they get in school. An integrated school accommodates all, or at least it ought to.

Again, I emphasise that we are independent researchers. We are not pushing for an integrated system necessarily. We are talking about the system that there is. We are trying to understand it. We are trying to find better ways of doing it. Certainly, you are absolutely right that we should be celebrating what controlled schools are doing, and we do. We are not saying that controlled schools are not doing it right. We are saying that a controlled school with a mixed intake will have a very different way of educating children than an integrated school. That is all we are saying.

Q26 **Carla Lockhart:** Would you accept that, within those schools, which have moved immensely, it feels like there is this supremacy, and they cannot get additional places? Parents are looking to go to those schools. They cannot get additional places because there is now the departmental responsibility to have cognisance of integration.

Dr Roulston: There is a tension between choice and what we need to do to try to create, as effectively as possible, a mixed, shared, cohesive and sustainable future for the place in which we live.

Professor Gallagher: It is worth reminding everyone that the controlled sector now includes not just schools that traditionally have a relationship with the Protestant Churches; it also includes controlled integrated schools. There are a couple of Irish-medium schools that are also controlled schools. The sector itself is quite wide.

The data and analysis that I published recently shows there are some examples of schools that have quite a mix in them. There is not a huge



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number of them. There should be more, but they certainly do exist. There is some research by a colleague of mine, Joanne Hughes, which suggests that a school having a reasonably strong mix does have an impact on the attitudes of the young people. There is some tentative evidence that it does make a difference. This is one of the areas where we need more research evidence about the experience of schools to try to understand what is happening at greater depth.

In relation to the issue around preference, the reality is that, on one level, the existence of the legislation does push the Department in that direction. In the Department's strategy for integrated education arising from the legislation, it highlights the way it looks at the additional places that are requested by integrated schools.

The need to address that was reinforced by the court ruling of some years previous to that around the situation in Drumragh. They do look favourably on requests from integrated schools for additional places as part of the broader area learning process.

The Fresh Start agreement created a significant pot of money for capital developments. Originally, it was intended for the shared education campuses, but its purpose has been widened since then to include capital developments in integrated schools and some funding around mixed housing estates.

To date, the integrated schools have probably benefited most from that capital development. There are huge maintenance issues across the schools. You can see why other sectors might look at that and be concerned about levels of unfairness.

That brings it back to the point that I made right at the very start. We have a chronically underfunded education system. It has been underfunded for a decade or more. The best way to address some of these issues is to fund our education system properly and fairly and to allow all schools access to the resources that they need to provide the high-quality education that our young people deserve.

Our teachers are working under immensely challenging conditions. They are doing a magnificent job, but they need more support to allow them to do that to an even greater extent.

Carla Lockhart: Thank you, Tony. I think you do grasp this, and I do respect your views on this. I want to make it very clear. I have Portadown Integrated School and New-Bridge Integrated College in my constituency. They are exceptional.

In no way do I want to be disparaging or for people to think I am not pro integrated education, but there needs to be a recognition that many schools are integrated and they really do feel so unfairly treated because they have a controlled sector badge above their name. I have schools that are literally falling down round us in the sector.



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There is some real bitterness building up. They feel like they are not getting what they deserve from the mixing pot. It is important that we recognise that we cannot continue to let one sector fall behind. People might decide, "We will go this way because we may get more." Integration and mixing happens naturally, I believe. You can see that in so many schools across Northern Ireland. That was more of a comment than a question.

Chair: That is a very helpful statement. Thank you, Carla.

Q27 **Claire Hanna:** I just wanted to come back in, because it is really interesting that we are getting into the detail. By the way, I take your point completely about ethos and the difference between the backgrounds of children and how you teach. There is a little bit of, "You may all come in with your different faiths, but you play by our rules."

I accept that, for a lot of people, the military trappings or the Catholic prayers in a school can be a chill factor. There is no doubt about that. Again, there is a tension with the avoidance thing that you are talking about. Those are things that exist in our schools and in our region. People have different faith practices and all of that.

What I want to get at specifically is similar to Carla's point. We hear all the time that 8% of children are integrated. The implication is that the other 92% of kids are hating on each other somewhere. People find it very patronising, frankly, particularly schools. You will know the constituency that I represent and the enormous diversity that there is in Catholic and controlled schools. They have dozens of nationalities and children from our traditional divides as well. How can we recognise those schools?

We cannot have a discourse that implies that integrated is the only way and everybody else is basically a troglodyte. What can we do to acknowledge those schools better and maybe to encourage them along the way? How can you define what you mean about the integrated education in a way that does not denigrate schools that have not made that tradition for a variety of reasons?

Dr Milliken: One of the concepts could be something like a charter mark.

Q28 **Claire Hanna:** You mean a kitemark of some type.

Dr Milliken: Yes, exactly. It would be an indication that this school is a welcoming school that accommodates diversity and promotes difference. That would not just be something for non-integrated schools. It could also be something that integrated schools would benefit from. It could be a public statement against certain—

Carla Lockhart: Did you say "kitemark"?

Q29 **Claire Hanna:** I said "kitemark". I say this as a full-time working mum of three kids, but a lot of what you are doing is, "Where can I walk to that has a breakfast club?" People are making a lot of decisions like that.



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People want to understand whether the school is going out of its way to accommodate and be welcoming.

I used the phrase “kitemark” to mean some sort of way to break down this analysis that everybody except those in integrated schools is hateful, does not want to share, is backward and all that. That is not the reality of schools in the various different sectors that I meet in my constituency and in others.

Dr Milliken: Of course, yes. Generally speaking, in any surveys that are done of parents, parents consistently say that what they want for their children is not a segregated education but the best education. However, as Tony has shown with his recent research, people still go down the road of going to the school that is most closely aligned with their traditional background.

Q30 **Claire Hanna:** They go to the school that is up the road. I will give the example of my daughter. We live seven minutes’ walk from academically the best school in Northern Ireland. That is the school that my child goes to. Those are the decisions that people are making. People are not saying, “I want to go there because they are all like me.” That is not the reality. It is people going, “Can we walk there?” We are in a climate crisis as well. People want to know, “Can my child walk and bike to school?”

We need to be more real about the factors and considerations. The implication is that parents are choosing to send their children to a school because it is where they went. You are wrong about that. People are weighing up a number of factors, including the best match for their child in terms of their interests and, primarily, how it fits—whether their childminder can pick them up from there and all that sort of thing. The discourse that implies that people are choosing those schools just for traditional reasons is wrong.

Dr Milliken: I am not suggesting that. In fact, I would suggest that the vision you are putting forward—that parents make the choice about where their child goes by looking at which school best fulfils their criteria—would be very much in line with our thinking. As I said, Tony’s statistics show that that has not changed a great deal in the last 25 years. Those schools still reflect that traditional divide.

Dr Roulston: You also made the point earlier about housing, Claire. We have not addressed that enough, in a way, because that is so instrumental in providing the context for what schools will be like and whether they are monocultural or not.

You are quite right: we should be celebrating those schools that are naturally mixed. I imagine that the integrated movement would think it would not need to exist if such schools were widespread, but in fact they are not that widespread. I did some work recently with a colleague looking at pre-school provision. It is even more heavily segregated than primary schools, and primary schools are very heavily segregated. A lot of them are 100% of one community.



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We are not saying that is a choice they are making as a community gathering in on themselves. It is just because it is the nearest school and they happen to be a Catholic community or a Protestant community. That is what that school becomes.

We need to look at housing as well as education. We need to look at a wider range of things, if we are going to get that natural mixing that you are talking about, which is very desirable. Again, I come back to the idea that just because a school is naturally mixed does not make it integrated.

Professor Gallagher: If I could add one or two quick points on this, Claire is right that sometimes in popular discourse there is a simple binary between integrated and segregated schools, as if everything that happens in integrated schools is good and everything that happens in segregated schools is bad.

I sometimes have concerns about the use of the term “segregation”. To me, the comparisons that are occasionally made with apartheid in South Africa or the southern states of the United States before 1954 are totally misplaced and a gross mischaracterisation of the situation.

The reality—this is something that we have talked about quite a bit this morning—is that all schools can make a contribution to helping to create a more settled, fair and shared society in Northern Ireland. There is plenty of evidence that lots of teachers and schools are committed to doing that. We should celebrate and recognise that.

There are some schools where the intake and enrolment has become more diverse over time. The research that I have done suggests that there are not a huge number of these. There should be more. We should be encouraging them to move proactively in that direction.

The goal of integrated education is to provide opportunities for young people to learn and study together. That is good. It is important that there are more integrated schools to provide that opportunity. In the meantime, it is important we work on as many fronts as possible to provide those opportunities.

As I have said on a number of occasions, the evidence is that it is having some impact because young people are the most liberal and tolerant age group in our society. The idea that, because only 8% of schools are integrated, somehow the rest of the schools are producing young sectarian monsters is, to me, completely misplaced and erroneous.

Chair: Thank you, Professor Gallagher, Dr Milliken and Dr Roulston. Thank you for provoking a very stimulating discussion. Some of our colleagues here almost became panel members themselves, but I thought that was actually a welcome addition, because injecting real, lived experience and bringing things up to date is a very important part of this. We do not want to create a report that somehow reflects a bygone past. My thanks to you for an excellent first session.