



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Shared and Integrated
Education: Department of Education and
Education and Training Inspectorate

21 January 2015

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Craig
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Nelson McCausland
Ms Maeve McLaughlin
Mr Robin Newton
Mrs Sandra Overend
Mr Seán Rogers
Mr Pat Sheehan

Witnesses:

Mr Andrew Bell	Department of Education
Mrs Faustina Graham	Department of Education
Dr Suzanne Kingon	Department of Education
Dr John Hunter	Education and Training Inspectorate

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Good morning. With us are Faustina Graham, director of collaborative education and practice; Andrew Bell, head of the shared education and community relations team, Suzanne Kingon, who is also from that team; and Dr John Hunter from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). You are all very welcome to the Committee. Please make an opening statement, and members will follow up with questions.

Mrs Faustina Graham (Department of Education): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to brief you on the shared education policy and Bill and on the community relations, equality and diversity in education policy, which is probably better known as CRED. I will refer to it as that in the briefing.

Turning first to shared education, I am pleased to report that the work has advanced considerably since I briefed the Committee on the topic in July 2014. Obviously, there is a high level of interest in shared education, and the Committee will therefore be aware that the Minister recently launched an eight-week consultation on his proposed shared education policy and the accompanying Bill.

I emphasise at the outset that the Department is keen to listen to the views of all interested parties and to have an informed and meaningful discussion on the plans to move forward. The policy sets out a comprehensive framework for the development of shared education, and it builds on the research,

consultation and recommendations of the ministerial advisory group. It aims to ensure that schools and youth settings receive the resources, support and encouragement that they need to start, or to continue to develop, high-quality shared opportunities for their children and young people. It is very much a blueprint that seeks to build on our existing educational structures.

While in no way attempting to compromise parental preference, the policy offers the opportunity to create a more cohesive education system in which increasing numbers of children and young people from different community backgrounds will be educated together.

The policy contains 14 overarching actions that will support the advancement of shared education. It sets out plans to define, encourage and facilitate shared education through the legislation and, furthermore, to support structures to fund, develop and embed sharing throughout the education system.

Practical progress has already been made on key ministerial commitments. The Delivering Social Change shared education signature project was launched in September, and the first call for applications was issued in November. The response has been very encouraging, and it is clear that there is a significant appetite in our schools for shared education. Successful applicants will be informed shortly. A second call is planned in the spring for projects that will commence in the autumn term of 2015.

Inspection findings and the accompanying research tell us that educational settings are at different stages in their readiness for sharing. Therefore, the application process for the DSC signature programme was accompanied and supported by a new self-evaluation framework, which the Education and Training Inspectorate, under Dr John Hunter's leadership, has developed for shared education.

The self-evaluation framework is a tool designed to assist practitioners in carrying out initial self-reflection to identify their baseline, set effective goals and then measure their progress, both throughout the programme and at the end. The process of self-evaluation leading to improvement is fundamental to the further development of not just our entire education system but, in this specific instance, the development of shared education. Our intention across the whole programme is that all elements of it will seek to explore, evaluate and incorporate key learning across the four years of the programme. So, it really will be an ongoing learning journey across the four years to the end of the programme, looking at the lessons we can learn and how we can modify the programme across the period rather than waiting to the end to accrue all of the learning.

Importantly, all of the work in schools will be contextualised in the Northern Ireland curriculum. A key aim is to ensure that shared education becomes integral to and infused with school development planning and improvement.

The education and library boards are nearing the end of a recruitment phase for a team of dedicated officers to support schools in advancing shared education. They will provide local, on-the-ground assistance, working with the partnerships to promote, plan and implement shared activity. In addition, 16 associate assessors, who are practising senior managers in schools, have been appointed by ETI to support them in the evaluation process. Obviously, capacity building will be developed across the four years for those working as associate assessors. Additionally, DE officials are working on proposals for a strategic approach to additional capacity building for teachers that will build on existing expertise.

A proposed shared education Bill accompanies the policy. It provides a legislative definition of shared education, placing a power on the Department and associated arm's-length bodies to encourage and facilitate shared education. Members will be aware that the Education Act places a similar duty on the Education Authority. As I have outlined, shared education is very much a developing area, and, given its wide scope, a power will provide the necessary flexibility as we seek to further explore, develop and ultimately embed the benefits of shared education. Enshrining the concept in legislation sends a very clear message that it is now a permanent feature of our education landscape.

Of course, there has been considerable debate about what constitutes shared education. Therefore, the Bill takes a very common-sense, practical approach. Essentially, shared education is about two or more schools, youth groups or early years settings coming together and educating children of different religious beliefs and from different socio-economic backgrounds together. The Bill is supported by the more detailed description in section 4 of the policy on how shared education will work in practice.

The aim of the CRED policy is to contribute to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self-respect and respect for others. The policy was designed to underpin and support existing curricular requirements to develop young people as contributors to society, that being contributors one of the three key objectives of the Northern Ireland curriculum. It aims to provide young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours that enable them to value and respect difference and to engage positively with it.

Since the introduction of the policy in 2011, considerable work has been taken forward. Dedicated CRED support officers have provided advice and help to schools and youth work settings to assess needs and deliver appropriate interventions. Almost 800 schools and youth work settings availed themselves of that support within the last two financial years. Guidance is available for all organisations, and it maps the policy across curricular subjects, links to teacher and youth work competencies and provides a self-assessment framework used to identify gaps and plan suitable interventions. A dedicated website provides a one-stop shop for practitioners and includes case studies, resources and support materials.

A survey undertaken across schools and youth work settings identified training needs, and a training strategy was put in place. Over 2,000 school leaders, boards of governors, Youth Service management, teachers and youth workers attended awareness sessions. In excess of 4,000 teachers and youth workers availed themselves of training to improve their CRED-related knowledge and skills. One in four principals engaged in training on dealing with controversial issues in the classroom. Over the last two financial years, 500 education settings availed themselves of CRED enhancement funding to reinforce learning. That involved in excess of 25,000 children and young people.

Since the policy's introduction in 2011, a series of measures to assess its effectiveness has been undertaken. The measures included a series of focus groups with practitioners as well as young people and the commissioning of a module in the young life and times survey. Both concluded that the majority of young people experienced CRED activities and that, where provision is good or better, these are effective in changing attitudes. The focus groups provided evidence of a more collective, whole-school responsibility for CRED work rather than relying on one or two teachers, with connections being made across subject areas and clear learning outcomes.

To inform future policy, the Department then commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate to undertake a formal review of the CRED policy and its impact on children and young people. Work was undertaken over the autumn term of 2014, and it is expected that the ETI report will be published in the next few weeks. Early feedback from the report has been very positive. Most of the schools and youth organisations visited demonstrated effective CRED practice. Indeed, the majority of the sessions observed were very good or better. The report will include a number of recommendations for further embedding CRED in the education system.

The Committee will, of course, be aware that, as part of the action to address pressures on the extremely challenging 2015-16 education budget, the Minister has proposed ending earmarked funding for CRED. The public consultation on the budget proposals closed on 29 December, and the Minister is reviewing the responses prior to finalising the budget. A full equality impact assessment is planned over the coming weeks.

These are still early days, and there is much work to be done in the weeks ahead to plan how best to move forward within a challenging financial context and in a manner that reflects the Minister's key priorities of raising standards for all and closing the achievement gap. In this context, we are looking at how best to support the further embedding and mainstreaming of the CRED policy, and to explore the synergies with shared education so that the good work observed by inspectors is built on and continues to make a significant difference.

I trust that this has provided the Committee with an overview of the work to date, including the difficult decisions for the Minister in balancing the budget. We welcome the opportunity to answer any questions from Committee members.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Thank you very much, Faustina. I refer to your final comments on CRED. We have a draft shared education policy and a draft Bill. One would think that, because there might be a certain element of duplication, there might be an attempt to phase out CRED. You said, however, that you may be mainstreaming or embedding it. Will they run as separate pieces of work or together?

Mrs Graham: The CRED policy, which was in place before we came to shared education, is designed to support the curriculum, particularly with regard to young people as contributors to society. It is almost like an umbrella policy, of which shared education forms a part. Equally, and alongside that, there are the other elements to do with equality and diversity, such as special educational needs, anti-bullying and the pastoral elements — all those things that will enable our young people to be active citizens of the 21st century.

The important thing for us is, as I said about shared education, to aim for the integration of all this work into the curriculum. Earmarked funding for CRED was designed to allow schools the opportunity to take something within the revised curriculum, as it then was, and think about how to make it an integral part of what they did, giving time and space to both schools and youth workers to look at how it was different, how it fitted in and how it made sense. We have now progressed that work. There is still plenty of work to do, and the report, I am sure, will indicate that to us.

For me, the two policies are complementary, and shared education forms part of the CRED policy, as do other supporting policies in the Department. CRED will not be phased out; rather, it will be phased into the curriculum, as I see it. The same is true of shared education. It is an opportunity for schools, in particular, to look at something that they have to think their way through. In truth, we have to think our way through, too. It is a learning experience for all of us. The ultimate aim is for that to become integral to the work of every school and to be part of the ethos and DNA of every school, but we have to accept where we are now and the fact that we are on a journey to that point. The same is true for both policies.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): In some ways, then, the draft policies on shared education that we are looking at enhance and support CRED.

Mrs Graham: Absolutely.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): I know we will come back to that again and spend a great deal of time on it. We will move to the Bill. You mentioned that the shared education policy and the Bill are going to "encourage and facilitate", but the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 states, "encourage, facilitate and promote". Why are they not complementary?

Mrs Graham: I think they are. To me, "encourage and facilitate" are stronger terms than "promote". The term "promote" is used when you are not in a position and you want to highlight it but cannot actually effect change. It is about trying to encourage that change. "Encourage and facilitate", however, are stronger words. Would you like to add anything, Suzanne?

Dr Suzanne Kingon (Department of Education): There is no inherent contradiction between "encourage, facilitate and promote" and "encourage and facilitate". In preparing the Bill, the Minister decided that he would go for the latter, which is in line with the Department's duty to the integrated and Irish-medium sectors. Those are the words that went in. There is no inherent contradiction.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): It is a power rather than a duty.

Dr Kingon: Yes, it is a power. The reason for that is that shared education is not a sector; it is not neatly wrapped and packed. It will, hopefully, involve a majority of our schools, and we felt that a power provided more flexibility. Also, some activities — curricular collaboration or teacher development, for example — may require more development at a certain time. It encompasses such a broad remit that a power gave greater flexibility than a duty, which is more suitable for a tightly wrapped and packed sector, if you follow me.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): I anticipate there will be quite a bit of discussion about the definition of "religious belief or political affiliation". How do you determine the political affiliation of a child or young person?

Dr Kingon: The crucial reason for putting in political opinion is that not all young people would subscribe to a religious belief, and it was designed to reflect that. The crucial thing in the definition is that it must bring together children from different community backgrounds, different religious and political beliefs, and children who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not. They are the two crucial elements.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): I will look forward to the responses and to discussing that again.

Mr Hazzard: Thanks for the presentation, although I would disagree about "encourage, facilitate and promote". I think "promote" is stronger than the other two, but I will leave it at that.

I wonder what the impact will be upon integrated education. Critics of shared education will say that this may be the death knell for the demand for integrated and that it will slow down the whole process of schools becoming integrated. I am looking for your views on that.

Mrs Graham: Again, I think it is a case of accepting where we are now. It is entirely possible for schools to be developed that are integrated and also for schools to transform to integrated status. That has not happened in substantial numbers over the last period; nevertheless, we cannot stand still on improving good relations and the education system for our young people in a range of ways. We have worked, certainly, with the integrated sector on the previous shared education programmes, and there is nothing contradictory about integrated schools being involved in shared education. Obviously, if in the course of that journey a school decides to transform to integrated status, that is something the Department would be content to happen. It has to be a case of bringing people with us. Saying to people, "We are going to tell you what is good for you, and you should be doing this" is not the way to win hearts and minds in sensitive areas such as this. It is about ensuring that we look at the stage people are at and allow them to integrate what they do into their current school. If they should then choose to transform to integrated status, that option is there at every point in the journey.

Dr Kingon: They are complementary. For some schools, shared education will be the right approach. Other schools may want to look at the option of transforming. Shared education can lead to schools wanting to go down the transformation route. For others, it will not lead that way, but the two are complementary.

Mr Andrew Bell (Department of Education): The integrated sector is at the upper end of the continuum for shared education, so the two are complementary. We found through the work on the shared education projects funded by the International Fund for Ireland that the integrated sector has already addressed a number of issues that it can share. Shared education is about sharing good experience across schools and between teachers and educators. So, for that reason, we see the integrated sector as part of this. It will share that experience with other schools and, equally, may benefit in other areas from other schools' experiences.

Mr Hazzard: Undoubtedly, some people will see the integrated sector as, as you say, the upper end of the continuum, but there is another view that — I would like your view on it — there is a contradiction in that the Department is now setting out to encourage and facilitate shared education when it already had a duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education. Some people will see it as a contradiction and think that it will negatively affect the original duty and so they should not be doing that. I want your take on that.

Mrs Graham: Ultimately, the Department's vision is to ensure that all young people get the best possible education. That is the overriding vision for the Department and that has to inform everything else that happens subsequent to that. So, to me, there is no inherent contradiction there in the sense that, given the range of schools that we have in Northern Ireland, the duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education will not be hampered in any way by something that is slightly different but complementary. If you want to probe the concept a wee bit further, I am happy to —

Mr Hazzard: There will probably be plenty of conversation today around it.

Mrs Graham: I am just not sure if I am answering exactly what you are asking.

Mr A Bell: The other key point is that the Minister has, on a number of occasions, when he has talked about shared education, mentioned the statutory duty and stated that he remains firmly committed to that. I do not think that there is any contradiction.

Mr Hazzard: No problem. I have one final point around the definition. How broad can schools take it? Can it include ethnicity? Can it include urban/rural? What about coed? An awful lot of our schools are still single sex. Will we see a move around the coed? Finally, will there be a penalty in place for schools that remain in isolation and do not look towards sharing?

Mrs Graham: I will ask Suzanne to answer that.

Dr Kingon: There is a definition in the Bill but, when you go into the policy, you will see that there is a detailed description of how shared education will work in practice. It is broadened out and makes it very clear that a key element of shared education is bringing all the section 75 groups together. That will obviously include ethnicity, children with disabilities and a different gender. You asked about a penalty, but, no, this is about encouragement. This is not about penalties for schools that are not involved in it, and we hope that, with a positive approach, a lot of schools will want to get involved in the programmes.

Mr Lunn: Thanks for your presentation. I would also cross swords with you over the word "promote". I am quite happy that it is not there because, according to the dictionary, Wikipedia and all the rest of it, it is stronger than "encourage and facilitate". But that is by the way. Just leave it out; it is OK.

From what I am reading, it seems the end product of the shared education programme is to promote more integration, if that is not a contradiction. The end result of the programme is where the integrated sector is at the present time. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) said to us only a few weeks ago that where we are is where the shared education promotion people would like to be. If you look at it the other way, what do you say to people who say that, in a lot of cases, shared education may well just be a cop-out that will give parents, groups and schools the opportunity to not integrate when that is the end goal that we are all looking for? I do not mean integrated per se as in a formula. I mean schools coming together. I want to talk about the Moy in a moment, but what do you say to people who see it as a cop-out?

Mrs Graham: As I said, this is contextualised in the Northern Ireland curriculum, first and foremost. It is not about different views in the sense of saying, "This is about all schools becoming integrated", so you are quite right in what you say there. This is about how our schools fulfil the objectives of the Northern Ireland curriculum, which include educating young people, first of all, as individuals, as contributors to society and contributors to the economy —

Mr Lunn: Before you finish that, I just want to slow you down. The opportunity for schools to partner each other requires cross-sectoral input.

Mrs Graham: Yes.

Mr Lunn: So, how can you say it is purely educational? I wish it was purely educational, but it is societal as well. There is a big emphasis on the societal benefit; it is written all over this document, with the end result perhaps being that children are being educated together.

Mrs Graham: I would argue that the societal element is educational in that way, because it is a fundamental part of our curriculum. Our young people need to be able to survive and thrive in a global economy in the 21st century, and they need to be active citizens. So, all of education is geared to ensuring that our young people have all the skills and attributes that they need to survive in a global economy.

For all of our schools, when we look at the elements of the curriculum, particularly around personal development and mutual understanding, we look at the statutory requirements of the curriculum around active citizenship and learning for life and work, all of which schools are required to pursue in order to deliver those elements of the curriculum meaningfully and to a high quality. It would be very difficult to do that without dealing with all the challenging issues that are going to come to light through the interaction with another school.

When I was working in ETI, the evidence that we accrued through the evaluation of all the sharing and education programmes demonstrated very forcefully that it would be very difficult for young people in those situations to fulfil the aims of the Northern Ireland curriculum without engaging with partner schools. That is something that we will look at as this programme develops, because it would be very difficult to do all the things that are required in the curriculum meaningfully — looking, as I said, at the curricular elements and but also at thinking skills and personal capability, attitudes and dispositions — without challenging people's beliefs, attitudes, understanding and tolerating difference and respect for difference.

In that way, rather than finding ourselves in a situation that has been criticised in the past, where community relations and education for mutual understanding, for example, were viewed as extra or additional to the curriculum, we seek, through the ongoing work on shared education, to ensure that it is integral to every aspect of education and in particular the ethos of a school.

For that reason, it would be very difficult for a school to engage in this in a way that would be, as you described, a cop-out. Obviously, John Hunter is here this morning with us. As this programme progresses, the expectation is that that work will be integral to the individual inspection of schools. Therefore, if a school is not delivering the curriculum in that way, ultimately that will come to light through that work. That said, that is not something that is going to happen right now; it will be built up over time and experience across the four years, because we want the Education and Training Inspectorate in particular to work collaboratively with the schools to accrue the learning across the four years.

Dr Kingon: It might be also useful to reference the ETI continuum and the fact that it is built into the Delivering Social Change programme that schools must progress at least one level along the continuum in three areas. Funding is contingent on progression, and progression and evaluation are built in, so there is no possibility of schools engaging in this in a half-hearted manner or not progressing along that continuum. That is a key element, and schools have been asked from the outset to self-evaluate against the continuum. John and his colleagues will be evaluating the progress.

Mr Lunn: Thanks for that lecture. The criteria for cooperating between sectors and schools appear to allow for a situation where a controlled grammar and a voluntary grammar could apply for shared funding. Technically, they are different sectors, but, in terms of societal division and so on, perhaps they are not. You can contrast that with a situation around an integrated school which is already operating on the cross-sectoral, for want of a better phrase, basis, but which cannot, on its own, apply for shared funding.

Mrs Graham: The important thing is that, as Suzanne said, we are trying to ensure that there is flexibility in how schools will apply for this work, and we are trying to ensure that they are looked at on a case-by-case basis. However, it would never exclusively be the case that we would look at which two schools are working together, because there are so many variations of how schools can be described in Northern Ireland. One of my colleagues described it as the eccentricities of the number of school categories that we have. For example, we will have a controlled school that may comprise almost entirely of Catholic pupils. So, we have to look at the range of factors that any group of schools applying for funding is bringing into the proposal. Ultimately, it will be on the total quality of the proposal. I am not saying that we would exclude any partnership, but something that looks as if it is not going to challenge the school in some way to further its thinking — as you have indicated — will be picked up in the range of evidence in the proposal that the school presents.

Mr Lunn: But an integrated school which, as you say, Andrew, is at the top end of the continuum as we speak, cannot of itself apply for shared education funding under this, unless they partner with somebody else. They cannot do it in-house. They are where you want to be.

Mr A Bell: One of the key issues of the programme is that it should be mutually beneficial to schools in the partnership. Integrated schools can bring to other schools their experience of how they deal with some of the issues around educating Catholic and Protestant young people and, indeed, people from other communities. There should be benefit to both sides, because it is about learning for the young people but, it is also, ultimately, about improving educational standards and learning for teachers in schools. Through the evidence in the pilot project, we learned that when schools — including integrated schools — work together on that basis, schools within that partnership benefit in totality. To leave an integrated school on its own means that it would not benefit from some of the wider issues that, potentially, it could do.

Mr Lunn: Can I ask about the Moy, very briefly?

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): I will bring you back in. Mr Hazzard wants to comment on the previous point.

Mr Hazzard: Can two integrated schools be in the process?

Dr Kingon: We look at everything on a case-by-case basis. There is no definite, "You can" or "You cannot". Everything is going to be looked at in terms of the quality of the application. We do not want to rule out anything at the outset. Take a controlled integrated school, for instance. Is it controlled or integrated? Or, a controlled Irish-medium school; is it controlled or Irish-medium? Schools can have a multiplicity of identities, and it is important that, at the outset, we do not say what will or will not qualify without looking at the details of the proposal. We need to look at whether it is bringing a good community balance and a good social balance together. That is our plan.

Mrs Graham: One of the issues for the integrated sector is that we have a number of schools in which there is not a balance insofar as even the expected levels. So, if there is an advantage there for schools that are close to each other, for example, and which are integrated but have a different balance, and those schools could benefit from working together, we would look sympathetically at that type of submission.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much for your presentation. I share almost all of your goals in trying to get everything integral. When I look at the definition in the Bill that is coming up, I am concerned that it is going to force people to have to choose to be of a certain religious or political belief. Is there not a better route of including cross-community, because there are so many other little different forms of communities in an area? One of the questions I have been pushed to ask is this: should we not be including communities in their schools, particularly mixed communities, because everything is not just Catholic, Protestant, rich, poor and everything else? Is there not room there for a little bit more flexibility by making it mixed community rather than trying to divide us into different groups?

Dr Kingon: Obviously, it is possible to put certain things into legislation. We collate the religious background of children through the school census, just as the socio-economic background is done. It is quite easy to read at school level. It does not involve an individual child self-identifying for the purpose of a programme. It is information that is readily available and, therefore, it is easy to make a rough-and-ready assessment of the school: what religious background the children come from and the social mix in the school. From that perspective, the legislation allows us to do that. Shared education simply must bring together children from different religious or community backgrounds. The definition does that. It also says that it is about achieving a good social mix. We know that systems in which there is a good social mix tend to be higher achieving. This is about tackling the long tail of underachievement that has pervaded our system. So this is a common-sense approach. It does what it is possible to do in terms of a legal definition.

Mr A Bell: I think that, if you look at the policy, as Suzanne said earlier, you see that it refers to all the section 75 groups, so it includes all those. That builds and adds to the legislative definition.

Mr Kinahan: It is my aim and we are also pushing for community use of schools. So, if you add in football, rugby, cricket, Gaelic or whatever, there are a whole lot of different groupings in there.

Mrs Graham: I think that, in trying to keep the definition simple, as Suzanne said, it is also taking account of the fact that every school is required to interact with its community. That is a key element of Every School a Good School; it is one of its four tenets. Therefore, that expectation is there. Within this particular programme, our expectation is also that schools will demonstrate links, not just with external stakeholders, but around how they are going to improve interactions with community. Interactions with community form a key part of the framework that ETI has developed. So, for us, one of the benefits will be that schools will look much more systematically at how they are interacting on that community level. So, it is not that it has been ignored in any way. As Suzanne said, it is about keeping the definition as practical as possible and in a common-sense way while being very aware that there are other requirements that will support exactly what you are talking about.

Mr Kinahan: Good. On a slightly different note, we have this conflict at the moment between schools that are integrated and those that have a super mix and are in different groupings. Do you see that, in the long term, leading to a change in how we define integrated schools? Will it make things more flexible? Part of our difficulties at the moment is that we are stuck to our definition of what integrated is, and that means that everything else is seen as not being integrated. Do you see it leading to change, so that schools that might be controlled but are really well mixed are allowed to be relabelled without it causing —

Mrs Graham: There is the issue that it is almost like discussing a label, as opposed to us discussing what the important elements of any school are. The Department's duty is to encourage and facilitate

integrated education not to encourage and facilitate the integrated schools or a sector as it exists at the minute. We have a definition of what constitutes an integrated school from the Treacy judgement, but, if we can move to a world where there is a broader understanding of what integrated education means, that would obviously be something to be welcomed. As Suzanne said, there is a debate about what shared education means, and the same debate exists around what integrated education means. What we are attempting to do with the definition in the legislation is to give something straightforward on which we can build over time and begin to get a clearer consensus around what that definition is.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Just on that point, do you see shared education as reconciliation or as achieving educational outcomes?

Mrs Graham: Both. This is something that we are debating and discussing at the moment as well. I see reconciliation outcomes as an element of educational outcomes, because all those things are intertwined. I think that everything that we do in the education system will lead to an educational outcome. We do not have sufficient clarity in talking about what the curricular, reconciliation and examination outcomes are. Truthfully, the language around all of that is quite confusing at the minute. We struggle with it ourselves. Part of the learning process for all this will be to get a sharper understanding of the various elements and how they all fit together. That is the honest answer.

Mr Rogers: You are very welcome. In terms of listening to other people's questions and what is coming out, is this about schools working together or children working together? There is a certain amount of confusion out there. Look at examples of really good practice and sharing, be it integrated, such as Shimna Integrated College in my constituency, a controlled school like Down High School or a maintained school like St Columbanus' in Bangor, where there are excellent cases of sharing going on. Those schools are being disadvantaged because they cannot apply for that funding. If our priority is bringing children together, surely there should be a lot more flexibility. It is nice to join up with a school of a different management type, but if the priority is our children working together, the Department should be creating more flexibility to encourage and facilitate shared education in the schools that are doing a really good job, be they integrated, maintained or controlled.

Dr Kingon: They can apply for the funding; all schools are eligible to apply for the funding. Quite rightly, as you say, there is really good practice in a lot of our schools, but we want to share that practice; we do not want to keep it pocketed in a few schools. Those schools are very well placed to participate in shared education programmes and bring the expertise that they have developed through dealing with children from different religious backgrounds. They are really well placed to bring that to a wider reconciliation programme in dealing with schools from different community backgrounds. That is what the programmes are about.

Mr Rogers: Yes, but surely they are knocked out immediately because of one of the essential criteria: they have not joined with a school from a different sector.

Dr Kingon: It is about two or more schools coming together to share. They can partner up with another school and apply for the programme and share their good practice.

Mr Rogers: I go back to my original point: it seems to be more about the politics of bringing schools together than celebrating children working together.

Mr A Bell: The policy is very much learner-centred. Indeed, the continuum model makes it absolutely clear that it is learner-centred and for the benefit of the pupils, children and young people. From that point of view, you need to ensure that the education workforce has the capacity and skills to address those issues as well. It is very much focused around the whole broad spectrum of being beneficial to schools and to the pupils. Ultimately, if it is beneficial to the schools, the pupils will benefit as a result. It is very much learner-centred.

Mr Rogers: I am delighted, John, to hear about the self-evaluation framework for sharing. There is a lot of confusion out there about what sharing actually is. Unless we have that framework, how can you even set a baseline? Will you tell me a wee bit more about that?

Mr John Hunter (Education and Training Inspectorate): We recognise very clearly that schools are at different starting points in this and that some do not wish to be at the starting point. Therefore, the concept of the continuum is to cater for the projects or partnerships that can get under way and those that need further time and training. The idea behind the continuum was to allow partnerships to have

a set of indicators or criteria as a baseline to measure themselves against. Our view was that the partnerships set their baseline, and that our job, particularly in year 1, is to be very supportive by quality-assuring in working partnership with them. It is to throw out the old concept that we are policing a system; we are working alongside. We are in going to be in a learning mode as well.

The continuum deliberately did not call its pillar level 1, level 2 and level 3. We were very deliberate about giving the notion of defining, expanding and embedding. Schools in partnership will find that they may not be in just one section but a variety of sections. Therefore, they can draw on what targets they wish to set for the partnership. We were very clear and honest that schools out there are not entirely sure about the concept. There are those who have experience of having gone through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) projects, and they will probably be the mentors and leaders in the first outworking of the programme. We felt that the continuum was the beginning of allowing them to give themselves a self-evaluation and almost a mirror of their current practice that could be used individually within the school, but, more particularly, as part of partnership working. It was designed for that reason.

We consulted quite widely, and it was built on the concepts in Every School a Good School. Schools are also very used to Together Towards Improvement and the methodology and approach within that. So far, it has been well received by the schools that have shown an interest in shared education.

Mr Rogers: Chair, I have one last one. If this is about all our children, why has it not been extended to special schools?

Mr A Bell: It has. Special schools are also involved in it. Indeed, our experience with the IFI-funded projects was that special schools were involved in those. Where they were involved, it brought a completely new dimension to the partnership, and more learning was derived from it. Special schools are involved.

Mr Rogers: If a special school was to look for funding, it would have to join up with a school from a different background and a different management authority.

Mr A Bell: They would join —

Dr Kingon: It would not need to be a different management authority; it just could not be another special school. It could be the same sector — a controlled special school and a controlled school. There would be no issue with that. It is always done on a case-by-case basis, but special schools are very much included in the programme.

Mr Rogers: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Mr Newton.

Mr Newton: I am content, Chair.

Mr McCausland: I want to ask a quick question before my main point. You mentioned that, under Every School a Good School, there are four areas and that there is something about interaction with the community. Is there some documentation that you could direct me to, to give some more indication of what that is expected to mean in practice?

Mrs Graham: The policy itself will give you the four elements that are required from schools. As Andrew said, those would be a need for it to be learner-centred; the quality of learning and teaching; the quality of leadership; and the school and its community. You will find all the various indicators that demonstrate that within the Every School a Good School policy.

Mr McCausland: OK. Thanks.

I was interested in Suzanne's point that a school could have a multiplicity of identities. That is true of us all, as well as schools. As the Chair said earlier, you touched on the issue of political and religious identity. However, running through all the documentation is the word "cultural", and we all have a cultural identity as well as a political and religious identity. If you bring schools and children together to share, however that is done — I am sure that those are some of the areas that they would want to look at in the course of that sharing — is there anything to ensure that there is something done on the

issue of equality? That was a point that was raised by Professor Hughes when she was before the Committee. Is anything done to allow them to come together with a similar understanding and appreciation of the home and community from which they come?

Some schools have a very strong focus on cultural traditions. Obviously, if a school is an Irish-medium school, it will have a focus on the Irish culture, and that is largely the same in schools that are overseen by the CCMS. However, that may not be as clear in controlled schools. How is that issue dealt with?

Mr A Bell: Having a culturally diverse learning experience is already part of the curriculum. That is a requirement of the curriculum and what it is built on. That is a key element in both primary and post-primary education and, in Key Stage 3 and above, cultural understanding features in every subject area under developing young people as contributors to society. It is an area in which, as you have rightly said, some schools are more advanced than others in addressing those issues.

There is an opportunity for improvement in that area, and shared education brings that opportunity to explore identities and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, when Professor Hughes and her colleagues were here, they spoke about cultural differences and said that shared classes broaden and deepen pupils' experiences. That was certainly the experience that we had with the IFI shared education programmes, which allowed for that.

We have touched on the CRED policy, and one of the issues with that is developing self-respect and respect for others. Part of that policy and the work that has helped schools to move forward in that area is about allowing pupils to fully explore and understand their own cultural background, either before they engage or as well as engaging with others. It is a core element, but shared education will help in that process.

Mr McCausland: Educationally, it is good that children are aware of the culture of the home and community from which they come. It is also a human rights issue, as we know. However, the issue is how it is actually implemented. From my understanding, it is not properly monitored across sectors and nobody has done any work on it. I have asked all the different groups — it is the same question that I ask all the time. It is an area in which there has been a lack of investigation, research and the establishment of good practice so that some sectors can learn from others. I make the point to you — I am sure that we will come back to it in the future — that there is a vast difference between the nature of cultural traditions work in controlled, maintained and Irish-medium schools, even though a controlled school may be in a community that is essentially monocultural, serving a particular community which, by nature, will quite often be that way. I was in a maintained school when they were announcing the school play, and it was about the life of the Irish rebel Robert Emmet. I do not think that I will ever go into a controlled school and find that they are doing a play about the siege of Derry.

Dr Kingon: You also have to be aware of the differences in the legislation that constitute the schools. Controlled schools are constituted under legislation that means that they must provide non-denominational religious instruction. That is obviously different and feeds through to cultural identity. Building on what Andrew said —

Mr McCausland: Sorry, what did you mean by cultural identity in controlled schools?

Dr Kingon: There is a difference in the legislation, and, you know —

Mr McCausland: The legislation does not specify that a Catholic maintained school has to do only Irish culture or give an Irish perspective on life.

Dr Kingon: I appreciate that.

Mr McCausland: Likewise, I would suggest that is nothing about what is being indicated about controlled schools —

Dr Kingon: I think the —

Mr McCausland: Controlled schools should surely reflect the culture. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, schools must reflect the culture of the homes and community from which the

children come. If it is a school in the Catholic maintained sector, it will, for example, probably have an Irish traditional music group. What is the equivalent of a traditional music group in a controlled school in a largely Protestant or unionist area?

Mrs Graham: The important thing, as you have pointed out, is our lack of monitoring, specifically —

Mr McCausland: Would you concede research as well?

Mrs Graham: I am sure that there probably has also been a lack of that. However, I think that we have to be careful about constituting particular sectors as lacking in some way in cultural identity. You have talked about plays and for me, as an English specialist, my first choice would be the quality of the literature. I would then look at what other cultural elements they might explore.

Mr McCausland: I do not know whether the play about Robert Emmet the Irish rebel was good literature. I do not even know who wrote it.

Mrs Graham: It may not be. In all honesty, I am not familiar with that, nor am I familiar with plays about the siege of Derry. It is about the educational benefits that would accrue from that and whether there are opportunities to explore cultural identity, first in your school and ultimately in a programme like this one. If the vehicle was literature or drama, it would be about looking at what benefits could accrue for both schools from that. Importantly, in trying to address your concerns — because I think they are genuine, and it is an indication of where we are at in our curriculum development — the continuum that John talked about and the framework for development there challenge schools to have the important conversations that you are talking about. It is hugely important that we begin to have those conversations.

In allowing two or more schools to come together, there is that then questioning of their work in all those areas and what their school is about, in order to begin to develop the partnership. In the work that I did with John prior to that, we discovered that even we in the inspectorate evaluating programmes did not have the language to explain and articulate our thinking in a way that allowed us to communicate that effectively with other people. That has been part of the learning process. Your question is well asked and is one that we hope to answer.

Mr McCausland: The monitoring and research that has not been taking place — how does that get started?

Mr Hunter: In the CRED survey, on the direct connection and observation of practice in schools, schools set out to meet the needs of their school population. One school may have a prayer room so that Muslims can have the time and space to explore, develop and meet their own religious needs, while in others there could be a common room where each denomination is allowed to practise distinctly or learn from one another. All that is building an understanding of difference and diversity, which is contributing to those who are developing and understanding fully their own identity vis-à-vis the identity of others. Add into that a school's focus entirely on special educational needs and you will find that that becomes a strong focus within the cultural aspect of the school.

When we are looking at the continuum, it is helpful to think that in one of the areas that schools find more difficult to face the challenging issues that are the elephants in the room in this situation, the best practice has actually brought within the PDMU programmes the more controversial issues. The pupils can use that platform to understand where their opinion sits vis-à-vis their cultural thinking and experiences. When you get to the embedding stage, it should be seen as the way we do things about here — that it is open, natural and transparent, that you think about others and reflect that in your own thinking, therefore it should give dispositions that engage better the learner and lead to better outcomes.

Mr McCausland: The issue that I have raised is an issue in itself, but it is given an added importance and significance once you move into the area of shared education. Whilst school A is doing what it does and school B is doing what it does, and they are miles apart, once you bring them together there is an additional focus on this. This issue about the cultural identity of controlled schools, based on the United Kingdom Government's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is fundamental. I have asked the Inspectorate about it and the academics who have come in from various universities. I will keep on about it, because it has been the elephant in the room and nobody has talked about it.

Mr A Bell: It is a key element of the CRED policy, which is founded on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have always said that the CRED policy was there to support and underpin what was already in the curriculum and to help schools to deliver the curriculum. Through the implementation of the CRED policy, I understand that one finding the inspectorate report is likely to reflect is that the learning of young people is experiential. When you bring young people together on a cross-community basis, it offers more opportunities to explore those issues. If young people do not feel that they know sufficient about their own background, that generates the interest, and they go and seek that. The CRED policy is a starter around that and has moved the work forward and enabled schools to better address that issue. As Faustina has said, there is more work that can be done in this area.

Mr Hunter: Much of the literature suggests that success through shared education is clearly linked to a balanced partnership in which the partners have common goals and common outcomes identified. In that sense, they really need to be focusing on the issues that provide division and difference, so that the understanding and the respect does grow with that. The other aspect of it is that shared education should highlight identity but not threaten it. I think that, in the best practice that we have looked at, pupils, young children and young people are very happy and content to engage in conversation with that. In fact, in our discussions with young people, they are becoming more articulate about their understanding and how they can express their identity and also explain the commonality of it with other youngsters.

I think that culture is a mindset and an ethos, but there will be those schools that have to move from the link being an event or a subject across the school's event to it becoming a way of thinking and planning, not just at leadership level but across departments. That takes time to embed, and I think that partnerships will need that time. Very few schools, if any, are at the embedding stage, and quite a number are at the first two stages, that of asking what shared education is and that it has to be something that has benefit to all of the participating schools. It is when we get to the expanding stage that we will begin to see that there is a culture or ethos of thinking, shared-education-wise. It is then that we will see the recognition. The programme that we are looking to evaluate is a four-year programme, so evaluation will take four years. We expect that, after consultation, support and interim reporting, we will be able only in the final report to say what have been the positive outcomes of the experience of the shared education for all of the partnerships.

Mrs Overend: The discussion has been very interesting this morning. There are a few area learning partnerships in existence already, and they are very successful. I presume that you have been engaging with them. What have you learned from them? Sometimes partnerships have been very successful, but with other education policies such as the entitlement framework, which really forces schools to step back and to deliver the whole range of subjects themselves. That means that they step back from the area partnership and it is not as successful as it was. There is that variation of policy and going in opposing directions. How do you see that being solved?

Mrs Graham: I think that all of it is a learning process. Back at the beginning of area learning communities, that was something that of itself did not grow organically. Schools were really grouped together into area learning communities, and we found that, over a period of time, some of those have really taken off, as you have indicated, and have become stronger and stronger. Others still struggle. From our perspective, we can look at the successes of area learning communities and allow some of this work to take place in those communities. Everything is staged in some ways. As John has indicated, there is a progressive journey there to be accrued. In the first instance, the entitlement framework was looking broadly at expanding choices in the curriculum and schools partnering for that reason. We have seen some very good work that has accrued over time. Where those partnerships are helping and where additional breadth has been offered to the curriculum, those area learning communities are in a really strong place to ensure that they can now integrate all the more challenging aspects of shared education into the work that they do. They have much more mature relationships built up now. The original focus was on curriculum, but it is now on integrating and on benefiting from all the other elements that they may or may not have addressed, because there are area learning communities that have looked very much at shared education. It is about taking those steps.

Mrs Overend: Can you explain that a bit more? What are the steps?

Mrs Graham: Looking at the broader elements of the curriculum. For example, if I were working in a school at the moment as an English specialist and teaching a GCSE or A-level class, I would select particular texts to teach. I can choose texts that do not appear to have any controversial issues in

them or, as we talked about earlier, something that is related to any kind of cultural identity related to this society. In choosing the text initially, I decide what I want to focus on. I can develop empathy for all the young people, which is part and parcel of our requirements here on equality, diversity and community relations. I can do that with a group of young people yet never deal with anything that might challenge their thinking on how they view others, how they view difference, how they show tolerance and how they are resilient in the work that they do. Equally, I can teach a certain text and ensure that, alongside its literary elements, I am tackling explicitly, as opposed to implicitly, all the elements that we are talking about that challenge their thinking, that challenge them to look at the other young people in the class with them and that make them think about how all the elements of their experience work to fulfil the examination requirements, obviously, as well as the broader aims of the school in which I am teaching.

Mr A Bell: If I have understood your question correctly, you are asking whether schools will step back from doing that at a later stage.

Mrs Overend: No, what I am trying to say is that some area learning partnerships have been successful in working together to deliver subjects, but the entitlement framework has perhaps meant that some schools say, "We need to deliver all the subjects ourselves and not work with the other schools". As such, the children will lose out on that sharing experience because of a policy that every school needs to deliver the entitlement framework. How can you overcome that to encourage sharing to continue?

Mr A Bell: The simple answer to the question is this: through the experience of the schools involved, because, when they start sharing, schools start to realise the benefits of doing so. For example, a couple of small rural schools may come together. A teacher may be teaching a year group and is the only teacher in the school doing that. Suddenly the school has a partner school and somebody else whom the teacher can bounce ideas off and share materials with. The two schools can do joint development events. We found that the schools funded through the IFI programme — do not forget that that funding has finished — start to realise the benefits that can come from the partnership, and that is what drives them forward to move to a more embedded stage. Once the schools start to realise that, they tend not to step back from it. They want to explore the benefits further.

Mrs Overend: I appreciate what you are saying, but a new principal may come in with a totally different idea, and the whole thing may fall apart. In the event of that happening, can you step in and provide guidance? Can anything be done to save the partnership?

Mr A Bell: One of the key things with shared education and the CRED policy is that a whole-school approach needs to be taken, because, if the school suddenly changes principal, there are sufficient others in the school who know the benefits and who can explain them to the new principal. It is they who become the driving force. Particularly around the CRED policy, one of the findings of the ETI report was that it was left up to one teacher, or one person, in a school who really wanted to drive community relations schemes, and what happened if that person suddenly stops working there? When a whole-school approach is taken, that culture spreads throughout the school, and, as John said, it becomes "what we do around here". That avoids the sort of issue that you raised.

Mr Hunter: I will give you an example from viewpoint of special schools. When special schools were invited to join area-learning communities at the beginning, for the first year and a half, they were coming to people like me and saying, "We've absolutely no idea why we're in this partnership. What use is it to us? What are we getting from it?" A year down the line, however, they had found their niche, and the other schools involved had recognised that there was something to be learned from the special schools being in the sector. At this stage, a sizeable number, if not more than 50%, of the learning communities have established subgroups for special educational needs support across the learning communities. The subgroups are being driven by the special schools. In some ways, area learning communities, and shared education in those communities, will be successful, but there are people who are willing to drive and sustain that, and all feel that they will get something out of it. In that sense, the better area learning communities are those that have been very active around how they can help their pupils and learners, irrespective of their school, and that accept their shared responsibility for pupils across the area-learning community. That is where we wish to end up. We want to move schools from the position of thinking of just their pupils to thinking of all pupils. That will contribute to improvement.

Dr Kingon: A very positive thing that we have seen in the applications for the Delivering Social Change project is a significant number of schools that originally came together as partners in an area

learning community wanting to build on that work and come into the shared education programme. There were a notable number of schools and partnerships like that. That is very positive and encouraging.

Mrs Overend: I have one final question. Everything that you talk about is carrot. Is there any stick in your thinking, or is it all carrot?

Mrs Graham: Ultimately, the evidence that we have accrued to date in the evaluation process around all the work previously done has indicated quite clearly that it would be very difficult to deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum meaningfully without engaging in some form of shared education. That is partially hypothesis at the moment and partially evidence-based. We do not have all the evidence to be very firm in saying that, but, really and truly, that is where we will find ourselves, because the more that we look at and explore shared education, the more that it seems to be indicative of what will constitute a good school. If you were to deliver the curriculum in its entirety and, subsequently, look at inspection outcomes after a four-year period, it would be very difficult to justify how you were doing that without engaging in partnership with other schools. That is the answer at this stage. I would like to think that we will get more information on that as we move through the programme.

Mr Hunter: It is important to say that, alongside the shared education projects, we took a decision that, in all inspections from last September, we would report on shared education where we found evidence that it was good practice. The carrot is at work. Our view is that, because it is an option, the schools willing to move in that direction will find it recognised and celebrated through their own internal evaluation or the inspection process.

Mr Craig: Apologies for being late. I picked up on what you said about the learning experience in the whole shared scenario, especially around the area-learning communities. Mrs Overend raises a good point. I speak from experience: the school of which I am chair of the board of governors linked up with the local maintained school on the A-level curriculum. It has been a good experience for both schools, because resources have been shared. I have listened to the debate since I came in, and we have been talking about the shared experience. The shared experience is almost a by-product of what drove all of this, which was shared resources. Are we going to lose sight of that aspect? Ultimately, for the Minister to get around any sorts of financial difficulties that are coming down the road, for not only the Department of Education but every other Department, that aspect needs to be central to what is driving this forward. In some respects, lack of finances will bring some form of integration into the whole sector. Is that still the main driving force and goal in all of this or are we now starting to change the emphasis?

Mr A Bell: You say the "main" driving force. The case for shared education is based on three main areas. The first is the educational case, while the second is the social case. The third, which is equally applicable, is the economic case. There are benefits to be accrued from schools sharing resources in the way in which you say. Part of the policy is around the shared campuses programme, in which there are opportunities. I know that you had witnesses here from the Department last week talking about that. At the school level, yes, schools do find that there are opportunities for them to save resources. If they do joint development days, that halves the cost of bringing in a facilitator. They can share materials and resources. That is still a key element of shared education moving forward. The focus has not shifted from that, but it is not primarily on the economic case and the need to save money. Shared education is driven not by that alone but by the educational case, the social case and the economic case together.

Mr Hunter: It might be helpful to add that our view as a result of the inspection process is that the last year of the evaluation has to focus not on the progress that has been made but on the capacity of partners to develop and sustain the provision. It is particularly about having to think of that as having been built into your system rather than thinking that there will be ongoing resource, which there may not be. We think therefore that our last year has to focus very strongly on how partners will sustain the provision beyond the current funding.

Mr Lunn: My question concerns the Moy experience. We were there last week and visited the two schools. They are two good schools, with very committed boards of governors, principals and teachers. We formed a good impression of both. We now have this proposal, which is one of your projects, to bring them together on one site under one roof but with different identities, classes and uniforms — you know the argument. What soundings do you take before making a decision to support such a scheme, which is, so far, unique? What is the extent of parental involvement and choice in your making such a decision?

Mr A Bell: That is the remit of the team here last week. What I can tell you, because we have been doing work on the CRED policy, and so on, is that those schools have worked quite closely over a number of years. They have built up quite an experience of working together, as I am sure you found when you visited them. One of the things that we have said, particularly on that whole area, is that communities ultimately need to be comfortable with what is proposed. Therefore, schools need to engage with the communities. I know that they held a number of sessions in those schools, where they brought in communities, local politicians, councillors, and so on. They did a lot of work with the communities. The expectation is that, by the time they come forward with a proposal, whether it be for a campus or shared education, schools will be engaging with their school communities — the teachers, the pupils, the parents and the wider communities that they serve.

Dr Kingon: In the protocol document for the campus programme, one thing that schools have to demonstrate is that they have the support of the individual managing authority. They have to provide clear evidence, as Andrew says, that they have engaged with the community and have its support for their proposal.

Mr Lunn: That was my point. The school did a community survey. There were 85 responses in favour of the solution that is on the table, 70 in favour of an integrated model and five that did not want anything to do with either.

The Department has the same obligation to promote shared and integrated education, more or less, although you can forget about the word "promote". Why would the Department therefore run with such an unusual solution as bringing schools together under one roof while maintaining different identities? I am well aware that the CCMS opposed this thing at the start but has now come around to accepting what is on the table. However, it would have opposed, implacably, any further move towards integration. Where does the Department's obligation in all of this begin and end? It seems to me that this was an ideal opportunity for a groundbreaking solution — the sort of solution that we need to see in Northern Ireland. It was an opportunity to have a maintained school and a controlled school come together. Use the word "integrated" or otherwise, but the opportunity for an amalgamation of two schools from different sectors was there for the taking, yet we have gone down this route.

Dr Kingon: The Department does not superimpose solutions on to communities. That was the proposal that came forward from the community and the managing authorities. The Department's role is to look at proposals as they come forward from communities. It is not the Department's role to superimpose a preferred solution on to individual communities. That is the proposal that the community came up with together.

Another point that I want to make is this: nothing in education is permanent for any amount of time. It may be that the schools develop and evolve as they go forward in their new building. There is plenty of scope for that to happen.

Mr Lunn: I get the impression from both schools that that is their ultimate wish. Therefore, encourage and facilitate the same obligation on either solution from the Department. Surely the Department must have an opinion on what is the best way forward.

Mr A Bell: We know from experience that, if you try to drive ahead of what communities are prepared to do, you will run into difficulties. Therefore, from the Department's point of view, what a community is comfortable with is where the starting point is. We do not want to discourage communities from moving forward. Those schools have done a lot of sharing in the past, so the opportunities for sharing that their model will give increases the number of those opportunities. Thus, the work in that area moves forward. As Suzanne said, over time, it will continue to move forward. I think that we need to move at the pace at which communities are comfortable to move. In this case, the community said that this was its preferred option and what it was comfortable with.

Mr Hazzard: I was delighted to hear that a Northern Catholic school is doing a play about a Southern affluent Protestant. It shows that even our single-identity schools can branch out and be diverse, even within themselves.

There is a cross-border dynamic to all of this. There is a lot of shared education going on in Fermanagh, for example, particularly around cross-border areas. We had a teacher exchange, where teachers from Church of Ireland schools in the South came North and taught various things. Where do the cross-border dynamics come into play?

Dr Kingon: Peace IV is very much a cross-border programme. There is going to be shared education programme funding for the Irish Government and the Executive. We see that very much being taken forward on a cross-border basis.

Mr A Bell: It is complementary to the work of the Delivering Social Change signature project. That project is being developed for those schools that are already doing a lot of sharing, and sharing in a meaningful way. It is being developed to embed further that sharing, because we know that, by further embedding it, more of the benefits are realised. We are working with the Special EU Programmes Body on the Peace funding. You are probably aware that an element of that funding is specifically for shared education. The aim of doing that is to have a programme that will tackle schools that are not doing sharing at the moment, or that are doing very superficial sharing. From the experience of the IFI projects, we know that schools at that level need a different level of support and a different type of support. They need to do more work with their communities, and they need to address such things as timetabling issues. All of that can be overcome, and there is experience of how to address it.

Additionally, the Peace funding will involve the schools in the South. We are working with the relevant Department in the South on how that can be implemented. Shared education is not a concept that the South has, per se, but the projects that you mentioned were IFI-funded projects, and the schools in Fermanagh were working on a cross-border basis. We will bring that experience through the Peace funding. In totality, the Peace funding and the Delivering Social Change signature project allow us to deliver all the policy areas in the programme.

The Chairperson (Miss M McIlveen): Thank you. You will be glad to know that no one else has indicated to ask a question. Thank you for your time. We will see you again when you come back to brief us on the Bill.