



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Integrated Education Bill: Northern Ireland
Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

4 November 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Chris Lyttle (Chairperson)
Ms Nicola Brogan
Mr Daniel McCrossan
Mr Justin McNulty

Witnesses:

Mr Mark McTaggart	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Mr Justin McCamphill	NASUWT
Mr Alan Law	Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Mrs Maxine Murphy-Higgins	Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Mr Kieran Ellison	Unite the Union

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I welcome Maxine Murphy-Higgins, chair of the Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NICICTU) education trade union group; Alan Law, the deputy chair; Marie O'Shea, Northern Committee — Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO); Kieran Ellison, regional officer at Unite; and Justin McCamphill from the NASUWT.

I apologise to everybody for the delay in getting started this morning. We look forward to hearing from you. The Education Committee has a good record of engagement with our unions over the course of its tenure, and members always regard it as highly important to engage with you guys properly. We look forward to doing that on the Integrated Education Bill. We can give you up to 10 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by questions from members.

Mrs Maxine Murphy-Higgins (Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions):

Thanks very much, Chris. We appreciate you giving us your time, and I hope that we will be able to stay within your timescale. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) represents over 700,000 members in Ireland, and we are talking to you on behalf of the Northern Ireland Committee's education trade union group. We have an apology from Marie O'Shea, and Mark McTaggart has replaced her.

In summary, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions welcomes the private Member's Bill, which makes provision for integrated education and its promotion. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions supports the Bill and hopes that it paves the way for the expansion of integrated education.

I will pass over to Alan Law, who will say more about how we see the Bill moving forward and how integrated education should be moved forward in Northern Ireland.

Mr Alan Law (Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions): I thank the Chair and the Committee. We very much appreciate the opportunity this morning. The Bill is a great start on this journey, and it is important for us to reflect on the efforts that brought it to this place. However, we ask the Committee to give due consideration to ensuring that the rights and terms and conditions of staff are fully protected in the development of the Bill.

One of the challenges that the trade union side faces in the education sector is the fragmented approach of the various employers that exist in it. That has unfortunately allowed terms and conditions to sometimes be diluted. We would like the Bill to take account of that so that, when it has progressed through the Assembly mechanisms, it achieves a consistency, so that the staff have the Education Authority (EA) as the employing authority. That is to ensure that the terms and conditions remain consistent. We have found significant challenges with various employers taking various approaches, and it dilutes the whole objective of collective bargaining. It is something that is missing from the Bill. It is not mentioned in any part of it, and we would like the Committee to give due consideration to that.

I pass to Justin, who will take you through other parts of it.

Mr Justin McCamphill (NASUWT): As has been said already, in principle, we support the Bill. ICTU supports integrated education. We know that division in Northern Ireland [*Inaudible owing to poor sound quality*] at the door of education, and faith schools are a feature of the education system in many parts [*Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.*] We have to face the reality that we live in a post-conflict society and there is an onus on us to craft structures that break down division. Part of that crafting goes beyond our political structures. It will also have to include our education system.

As well as doing work on integrated education, the ICTU supports the removal of article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to allow teachers to have the same protections in law as other workers. We support the expansion of the definition of integrated education in clause 1 to include children who are suffering socio-economic deprivation.

One of our biggest concerns is that it will be very difficult to have a proper integrated model until we deal with the issue of academic selection, because the reality is that many parents are choosing integrated education at primary level and that seems to drop off at post-primary level. We believe that the Department of Education should have a duty to promote education, not merely to encourage and facilitate it, but we think that the Committee needs to give some consideration to how you would resolve a conflict for a body like the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), for example, that would be involved in promoting Catholic maintained and integrated education. Of course, we think that you would resolve that by having one education body responsible for the delivery of education, and we believe that a mistake was made in not rolling out a single education and skills authority. We know that the independent review will look at those things, but, at the same time, we should not miss an opportunity now to make some progress on integrated education.

I echo the points that my colleague Alan made. We cannot have further fragmentation. If area plans identify that an integrated school is the best model, it should be under one of the existing bodies or, hopefully, in the future, under a single education body. Thank you. I will hand over to Kieran.

Mr Kieran Ellison (Unite the Union): Thank you. I will add a personal flavour. I was educated in Glengormley High School. One of my daughters has come through that school and another is still there. Recently, that school — a secondary school — voted to change to integrated education. When those debates were happening, a section of the conversation between the parents, the headmaster etc was about the staff in the school remaining in the Education Authority. That was an important part of that conversation and was broadly supported by the parents. They did not want to move to some form of independent school; they wanted integrated education within the Education Authority.

I would like to point out that, during the pandemic — we are not through it yet — the Education Authority did a lot of the heavy lifting on risk assessments and providing a whole range of skill sets that were missing from independent schools at that point. The Education Authority had to do the hard work and heavy lifting to get to that point. Independent schools may have thoughts and ideas and think that they are good ideas, but, when the pandemic came along, it demonstrated that, at that point, the broad nature of the Education Authority was the best model. It was the Education Authority that had to do all that heavy lifting to get the schools open safely. A move away from the Education Authority would create a plethora of new problems rather than solving them, and we would prefer that we move to integrated education either within CCMS, which has its own personal conflicts, but, preferably for us, within the Education Authority, because that is the model that has proven recently to be the very best model.

I will pass over to Mark. Thank you.

Mr Mark McTaggart (Irish National Teachers' Organisation): Thanks, Kieran. There have been issues around area planning in that the Education Authority and CCMS seem to be moving at different speeds. Integrated education appears to work best where the community is already integrated. There is a danger in presuming that, following area planning, every school will be integrated, because there is an issue as to whether people will go to the school. Not every community is in the same place on integrated education or is as supportive of it. It is very important in area planning that, if you are opening a new school, you look at the area in which you are working. As Justin said, we already have an issue with the transfer test. Where there has been the expansion and closure of certain schools, what has tended to happen is that the grammar sector school remains open and the non-selective school closes. While the kids move and become integrated, the staff often do not move in the same direction, so there are things that need to be sorted out there.

In area planning, while we are very supportive of integrated education, we need to be aware that not every area is ready for it. A lot of education will have to be done with local communities about what will happen with integrated education. That is a cautionary note rather than a bar. Where area planning takes place, while an integrated school may be the best model for the education system that we have at the minute, communities may not be open to or ready for that. We need to be aware that those things have to be taken into account as we move forward with integrated education. We should be working through the existing shared education model at this point, until, as I say, places are ready for integrated schools to take over.

As Kieran pointed out, the integrated sector is involved in the negotiations on teachers' terms and conditions, but, because it is its own entity, like grammar schools, we would prefer it if an overarching body like the EA were involved in those schools to give advice on staffing and things like that, so that the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) agreements are rolled out in the same way in the integrated sector as they are in the EA sector and the Catholic maintained sector.

Mrs Murphy-Higgins: Thanks, Mark. Chair, that is our evidence. In summary, we see some issues with the fragmentation of area planning for schools in Northern Ireland. We believe that integrated education has to be led by demand and demographics. The further issue that we have is with the fragmentation and fracturing of the workforce. We believe that integrated education should remain under the umbrella of the Education Authority and that the collective bargaining structures for teaching and support staff should be replicated in the TNC, which applies to all teachers in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the workforce on our support side is more fragmented when it comes to grant-maintained integrated and voluntary grammar schools. If there is an expansion of grant-maintained integrated schools, we would prefer it if those were in the controlled sector and under the control of the Education Authority. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thanks very much indeed, folks. There are some really important points for us to take away and consider and to discuss with you now. Do members have a few questions?

Ms Brogan: Thanks, everyone, for your presentation. There are some really interesting points, as the Chair said. Alan, thank you for bringing up staff concerns. You are right. I have not yet heard that raised in our discussions on the Bill. That is a really important issue, and we should focus on it. You and a few others made valid points that should, of course, be considered.

The biggest concerns about the Bill that have been exposed in Committee relate to the meaning of "promotion" in clause 5 and the presumption in clause 7 that all new schools will be integrated schools. There is a fear amongst other sectors in the education system that clause 5 would elevate integrated education above them. The first sector that springs to my mind is the Irish-medium sector, because I know the struggles that it faces. I was at Gaelcholáiste Dhoire a few weeks ago, and I can see where it is being left behind compared with other schools. Elevating integrated education above Irish-medium education does not seem fair to me. The Bill sponsor, Kellie Armstrong, said that she would consider changing that wording, but where do your thoughts lie about having the word "promote" alongside "encourage and facilitate" integrated education?

Mr McCamphill: I will answer that. My view is that both integrated education and Irish-medium education were elevated above other sectors in the Good Friday Agreement, and it is right that Irish-medium education, which, at the end of the day, is a small sector, is protected and is not damaged by *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]* In relation to clause 7, there should be a presumption that

proper consideration is given to an integrated solution during area planning. It may be that you find that it is not the answer, but, if no consideration is given the *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality]* authorities will say that it is not their business. They want to look after their own sectors. We could at least force that discussion *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]*

Ms Brogan: Justin, I am not sure whether the problem is with my line or yours, but I just about made out what you said there.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Justin, your audio is difficult at the moment. In case anyone else did not pick it up, the crux of your feedback was that the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement specifically referenced integrated education and Irish-medium education, so there are grounds for particular treatment in that regard.

When it comes to area planning, you have a concern about clause 7 and the presumption of an integrated education school, when, at the moment, there is very little consideration, if any, given to integrated provision. There is a need to specifically reference the encouragement, facilitation and promotion of integrated and Irish-medium education. There is a need for area planning to be more robust in that regard. I have tried to summarise that as fairly as I can in an unbiased way.

Mr McCamphill: That was a very good summary, Chair. I hope that the sound is better now.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It is much better.

Mr McCamphill: I should have been sitting closer to the computer.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That is it sorted. I will hand back to Nicola.

Ms Brogan: Thank you, Chair and Justin. Does anyone want to come in about either clause 5 or clause 7, before I move on? *[Pause.]* Everyone is happy enough.

The other issues that have been raised from the beginning relate to the independent review of education and the panel that was set up for that. There have been questions about whether the Bill pre-empts the panel's findings. I also raised that with the Bill sponsor. She said that her fear is that the review could take up to five years to come through, and that is why she wants the Bill to go through now. I cannot argue with that, but what are your thoughts about whether the Bill pre-empts the findings of that review and duplicates that work, essentially? *[Pause.]* I will leave that open. I do not know who wants to jump in.

Mr McCamphill: I addressed that in my opening remarks. Waiting on the independent review would be problematic. We already have concerns around the review's independence, but, even once the review is complete, we will need legislative change, and there will be a lot of political debate. It is one of those things that we could be waiting a long time for. We know how long we have been waiting for a bill of rights framework for Northern Ireland, and this could end up the same way, so we should not miss the opportunity when it is in front of us. The Bill may or may not pass by 22 March, but we are better taking the opportunity when it is here.

Ms Brogan: That is fair enough, Justin. I know that you have concerns about the new schools, but what are your other specific concerns with the Bill? I outlined a couple of them but is there anything that you have specific concerns about?

Mrs Murphy-Higgins: One of our main concerns is the logistics of it. As we have said, area planning already gets completed here in a very fragmented way, so the issue is when it will happen and who will be responsible for it. At the minute, the Education Authority looks at area planning in relation to the controlled sector and CCMS looks at it in the maintained sector. If there is potential for a faith school, essentially a Catholic grammar school, to undergo an expansion, closure or amalgamation, it will be from that sector and will become a voluntary grammar. The concern is how we grow the sector when we are already that fragmented. That is one of the fundamental concerns that we have: how do we grow the sector when we already have CCMS and the Education Authority moving forward separately in area planning, and we are not looking at joint moves forward? That is fundamental.

The promotion of integration education is not new, but how are we doing it? Schools that are potentially not viable are converting to integrated schools, but are they going to be viable? Time will

tell, from looking at the demographics in the areas where schools have transferred, we have concerns. We are definitely not opposed to it, as we have said, but you can see the logistics and how we are going to have difficulties in growing that sector with our current area-planning mechanisms.

Ms Brogan: That is fair enough, Maxine. I am happy enough with all of that. Thank you so much to all of you for contributing.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Maxine, that is an important conversation that has been developed by the introduction of the Integrated Education Bill. The identification, assessment and meeting of pupil and parental demand needs to be better, and, as you said, it needs to be done more on an area basis rather than just a sectoral basis.

I always try to remain as Chairperson-like as possible and not show my support for the Bill, but one of its key aspects is that it endeavours to focus us on how that area planning is done and how we identify and assess demand. The Committee met with the UNESCO Centre about a community conversation toolkit that it has developed, which seems to be one useful way of identifying, assessing and meeting demand on an area basis with direct engagement with people. That is definitely part of the conversation that is being developed as a result of the Bill's introduction. I heed the concern that you are raising, Maxine. Thanks for that and thanks for the questions, Nicola.

Mr McCrossan: Thank you all for being with us and for your evidence this morning. This has certainly opened the eyes and ears of many across all sectors in education, and it has opened considerable debate in many places and among parties on how it can be shaped to work or, as you said earlier, Maxine, be viable.

There are a number of questions. There is concern that the Bill, in its current form, will lead to a considerable number of judicial reviews. There is also concern about some of the challenges that it presents for various sectors. Do you feel that that will be the case if it goes forward?

Mr McCamphill: Daniel, if you put more requirements on anyone in legislation, that will obviously open up the opportunity for judicial reviews. However, that should not be a reason for not legislating.

Mr McCrossan: On that point, Justin, it is claimed that the Bill is designed to give the integrated sector a level playing field. Nicola touched on this. Do you believe that placing a duty on the Department of Education to promote integrated education will do that, and will not place the integrated sector in a position of significant advantage, as some in other sectors have claimed?

Mr McCamphill: You have to look at where the integrated sector is now. Currently, it teaches only 7% of young people. There are various reasons for that, one of which relates to academic selection. The integrated sector needs a boost. As I said, given that we are in a post-conflict society, we need to look at our education structures. The Bill will not turn every school into an integrated school; we are a long way away from that. It will allow that sector to grow beyond that 7%. By getting into area planning and encouraging and considering integrated schools, it has the potential to make a difference. However, at the end of the day, we are realists. If, in those community conversations, communities say, either for demographic reasons or because they do not want to do it, that it will not happen, it will not happen. However, that is not a reason for not trying.

Mr McCrossan: I completely understand that. However, obviously, the Bill needs to be shaped properly in order for it to be successful when it goes through the various processes of the House. Unfortunately, in its present shape and form, that will be very difficult because of the many hurdles and challenges that are raised. The issue that I have just mentioned is one of them. Further to that, there is the duty on CCMS or EA to promote integrated education. That also raises questions about whether the Bill places the integrated sector on a level playing field with other sectors, or gives it an advantage. Issues like that are creating ill feeling amongst other sectors. That is where the challenges started, even at the earliest stages of discussion on the Bill. That is why we have tried to thrash it out.

Justin, you mentioned that not every school will become an integrated school; that is fair enough. However, there has been some controversy about what the term "new school" means. What do you all think is meant by how that is written in the Bill: that every new school will become integrated?

Mr McTaggart: I am not sure that it actually says that every new school will become integrated. I think that the idea here is that, if, for example —

Mr McCrossan: The Bill, in its current state, requires all new schools to be presumed to be integrated.

Mr McTaggart: Yes. I agree with that. However, what I am saying is that a new school will either be a complete new build where there was no school in place previously, or it will be the result of area planning. When a new school is being looked at, there is problem for ICTU because, as Maxine pointed out, there is fragmentation in area planning. When a school gets into difficulties with its numbers, a formula is used to decide whether the school will be open or closed. Then, whether schools can be amalgamated or which schools it can work with is looked at. While you have only one sector looking at that, you will never move towards proper integrated education. Shared education is a very important stepping stone. Where you have shared education and good relationships being built up between schools in areas across the North, you will get a better understanding of how integrated education could really work.

The problem here is that, in area planning, integrated education is actually not seen as a viable option in many places where, actually, it may be. As I said earlier, it goes back to whether the community actually wants it. It should be presumed that integrated education is looked at as an option in area planning and the building of new schools. At the minute, if a number of Catholic maintained schools and controlled schools are closing, they are looked at separately even if they are in the same area. There is no joined-up thinking about opening new schools.

Mr McCrossan: Surely the key focus and objective of integrated education is to bring communities together to be educated together. If an integrated school opened in an area of Northern Ireland, the community of which is currently 90-something per cent Protestant or 90-something per cent Catholic, and the pupils reflect that, how is that school truly integrated?

Mr McTaggart: I do not disagree with you, Daniel: it is not. You have to look at whether integrated education is viable in a particular area. We should all be moving towards one sector. It goes back to what Justin McCamphill said earlier: the mistake that was made at the very start of this was that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) was thrown out and the sectors were left the way that they are. Had ESA come in, in the form that it was supposed to, integrated education would have come along naturally, more than it has. The concern is that you are trying to force in something that is not ready to be forced in.

Mr McCamphill: Daniel, if you are getting at clause 7(2), which talks about not giving consideration to demographics, then, rather than saying, "We are against everything", the Committee should look at what clarifications are needed on that. As you said, you cannot have an integrated school if that school will not have a balance.

Mr McCrossan: Yes

Mr McCamphill: The demographics will be a factor in that.

Mr McCrossan: I take that point entirely. For clarification purposes, the Committee is not against everything; we are trying to weed out the potential hurdles and issues in the Bill and amend it properly so that it is entirely reflective and successful. That is what is important. There are a number of stumbling blocks that need to be overcome. It is important to hear where you stand on some of the key issues that are raised continually by those who we engage with, even beyond the Committee. There are concerns about the Bill.

The independent review of education was mentioned. Justin McCamphill said very honestly and openly that there are questions about it and how it proceeds. One thing is absolutely certain: something needs to change. We need a more inclusive education system that focuses on educational experiences and opportunities for all our young people on an equal playing field. It is about how we do that effectively. It is vital that the Bill faces full scrutiny to ensure that we can shape a successful outcome.

I spoke to a person about this during the week. They said that the Bill asks for too much, too quickly. Some would say that. Equally, however, if the Bill is shaped properly, I do not believe that that will be the case. I know that CCMS continues to raise concerns about the Bill. In parts of my constituency, school leaders have also raised concerns about it. However, I have said that these are the early stages of the Bill and that we will continue to shape it. You have raised some important points about where you see things as being at. The integrated movement has been on the go for a long time. It is

important that we all recognise that not enough progress has been made on developing the sector. The fault for a lot of that lies solidly with the Department of Education. We have to shape this.

Thanks very much , folks.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thanks, Daniel. You have given me an opportunity to intervene to balance my independent and impartial approach. Regardless of what the Committee thinks of the Bill, for the avoidance of any doubt, the Committee Chairperson supports the Bill. The Committee has received a significant amount of support for the Bill from a number of organisations; that is on the record. We are in our third month of scrutinising the Bill. Respectfully, I say that "too much, too quickly" was a pretty commonly used phrase at the time of the civil rights movement.

Mr McCrossan: *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]*

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): "Too much, too quickly" was a principle used to try to slow down civil rights at the time of the civil rights movement. That is one for us to reflect on. That is the public service announcement from the Chair over. Thank you for those questions, Daniel, and for the responses.

I will bring in Justin McNulty. *[Pause.]* Justin, you need to unmute your device. *[Long Pause.]*

Mr McNulty: You would think that I would have learned that by now. Thanks, Chair. Thanks, folks, for your time today. I know that you are not time-rich and that you have a lot of stuff on your desks, so thank you very much for taking the time to speak to us.

I think that what I am hearing from you all is resounding endorsement for the Bill in its current guise; am I right in saying that?

Mr McCamphill: We recognise that tweaks may be needed, Justin. We are not saying that it will be perfect. As the Chair said, the Committee has spent three months hearing evidence, and you, in your wisdom, will look at these things. We need clarification on what "other education bodies" are. Does that mean that you are telling CCMS, for example, that it has a duty to promote integrated education? Whether the Bill is saying that will need to be teased out. The Committee will have to look at whether that is practical. Certainly, what we are saying is that integrated schooling has to be the first consideration in area planning.

Mr McNulty: OK. Nicola and Daniel mentioned clauses 5 and 7. Do you have any concerns about those clauses?

Mr McCamphill: No, but I can see how ruling out demographics could be problematic, so that may need to be teased out a bit more.

Mrs Murphy-Higgins: As we have said, Justin, it is about how it is brought through. Mark talked about new schools and about promotion. What does that mean? How does the Department of Education, which will have responsibility, promote that when CCMS and the Education Authority are working through area planning? We need a way of joining up area planning so that we can see the integrated education system promoted to the level that the Bill wants it to be.

Mr McNulty: Maxine, you mentioned the fragmentation of area planning; Mark and, perhaps, others also touched upon it. Integrated education is not seen as a viable option in some areas. There is the piece about talking to and preparing communities. What do you see as the challenges around the fragmentation of area planning? What does that mean? How would that be addressed in areas where integrated education is not seen as a viable option?

Mrs Murphy-Higgins: Justin, as we have, hopefully, set out, when the Education Authority looks at area planning and the viability of the schools under its control, it asks, "How do we make that school viable in the area, with its demographics?", but it looks at that within its own sector. In the same way, when CCMS looks at Catholic schools within its remit that are not viable and at a merger, closure or two schools coming together, it looks at that within that sector. Generally, only where there has been parental or community involvement have people said, "We have to save this school. It is not viable within this sector, but, because of the way that the integrated sector is developing, we can transfer that school to make it integrated and still have a school in the community".

That is how we see it actually working. The systems are running in parallel, Justin. We are not saying, "There is a controlled school that is not viable and a Catholic maintained school that is not viable. Can we do joint consultations?". It usually happens only with the integrated sector and the community getting involved. However, if a school in the Catholic maintained sector has another school in that sector that it can join, it will do that before it looks to the controlled sector, and vice versa. Those bodies will, for want of a better term, sort themselves out within the sector that they have control over. We are trying to ask whether we would have a better outcome, and actual integrated education, if we had the Education Authority or one overarching body looking at the population and the demographics of an area in their totality, rather than it being done by sector.

Mr McNulty: OK. Mark mentioned ESA and the fact that the legislation to create it did not go through despite it having so much promise; it would have made a difference to where we are now. What lessons can be learned from why that failed to make an impression? How can the current proposal make things better? ESA was full of promise but did not happen. This proposal is also full of promise. How can we learn from what happened with ESA to make this proposal come through and ensure that it delivers in the way that it needs to?

Mr McCamphill: The reality is that ESA did not go through because, in the end, there was not political consensus on it. One party, which is not represented at the Committee today, voted against it, and that is why it did not happen. It comes down to whether the political will is there to make this happen.

Mr McNulty: I believe, for sure, that the political will exists to make it happen. It is just about fine-tuning the Bill, which you are all on board with. That is what we are determined to do. We feel that the Bill has to be fine-tuned so that it passes every stage that it needs to.

Folks, thank you very much for your time today; I really appreciate it. Thank you for all of your ongoing efforts throughout the pandemic, which has been very demanding of all of you.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Folks, that brings to a close our questions. I am really grateful for the time that you have given us this morning. I am reluctant to do this given how much it could extend our meeting, but it may be worth giving you a few minutes, in closing, to summarise your thoughts on the Bill and identify any key and urgent issues that you think that the Committee should include in its consideration in the next few weeks? I will hand back to Maxine first. Justin McCamphill can come in after that if he wants.

Mrs Murphy-Higgins: Thank you for that, Chair. Kieran or Alan may want to say more about this. One of the key concerns that we have is about fragmentation of the workforce. All schools follow what comes out from the Teachers' Negotiating Committee. One body does all those negotiations. However, we find that it is becoming more fragmented in our support side sector. When it comes to the support side in grant maintained, integrated and voluntary grammar schools, the schools are not necessarily following the Joint Negotiating Committee rules, which means that even pensions could be different. That is not useful for a workforce.

We want to see that responsibility being held by the employing authority, which, for controlled schools, is the Education Authority. As you probably know, the Education Authority looks after support staff in all schools, including those in the Catholic maintained sector. That is one area where we actually do have it. The Education Authority looks after, in the main, all the support staff who are within its control, whether they work in the Catholic maintained sector or in schools that are run by the Education Authority. We would like that to continue; we do not want to see it fragmented. From a workers' point of view, we do not want to see fragmentation of the employers. That is a fundamental issue that we have.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It would be well worth us engaging with you on that in more detail, Maxine. We will be glad to do that.

Mrs Maxine Murphy-Higgins: Yes, thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Justin McCamphill, do you want to come in briefly before we close? *[Pause.]* His internet connection is playing havoc. Does anyone else want to make a final comment while we try to get Justin back in?

Mr McTaggart: I echo what Maxine said. It is not just important for support staff that terms and conditions are recognised by the schools. We have had issues in the past with the grammar sector and the integrated sector not really recognising the teachers' agreements either. If the Bill is to be passed, some amendment may be needed for it to say that the agreements that are already in place for the controlled schools and the Catholic maintained schools will run across all schools.

Mr Law: It is not surprising that trade unions want to raise our members' issues: that is primarily why we are here. It has been really encouraging that Committee members have accepted what we have had to say and engaged with us on the matter. Whilst the EA exists, its structure presents many challenges to us; it is far from perfect. We are negotiating with the EA in relation to a large number of members. Then, we have all the independent grammars and other organisations that sometimes mirror what the EA does and sometimes need to be coaxed into doing that. The Bill presents an opportunity to ensure that there is no further disintegration of the sector.

Some people are asking whether it is pre-empting other work, but the Bill talks about the fact that a review of education in the integrated sector was published in 2017, so I do not think that anybody could be accused of rushing things. We need to see progress, but we do not want to see it at the expense of other important things that are going on, namely the maintenance and harmonisation of terms and conditions across the sector.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thanks for that, Alan. I am trying to give Justin as much time as we can to come back in.

Increasingly, the key is identifying, assessing and meeting pupil and parental demand for integrated education, and taking cognisance of the additional points and concerns that are being raised. I do not see how improving the extent to which the relevant bodies identify, assess and meet pupil and parental demand for integrated education pre-empts any further reform that is clearly needed to make it a more efficient and integrated education system.

Justin, we have you back.

Mr McCamphill: Yes, thanks very much. Sorry, I missed some of what was said due to my internet connection, but I picked up what was said by my colleagues. We do not want new integrated schools being set up and becoming schools in their own right without support from the Education Authority. The unfortunate reality is that, per head, we have a greater number of HR issues in integrated schools than we do in other school types. A lot of that is to do with not having support from the EA. Any new school that is set up must be under the employing authority, for not just teachers but support staff. Many integrated schools that we visit call themselves "rights-respecting schools". We need to ensure that they respect the rights of their workers as well.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. Folks, thanks very much indeed for your evidence this morning. We could talk about a number of the issues in a lot more detail, and, hopefully, that will be possible in due course. We really appreciate your help in trying to progress the Bill through its Committee Stage in as constructive a way as possible. Thank you for your ongoing engagement with the Committee on the wide range of issues that are affecting our education sector.