



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Integrated Education Bill:  
Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic  
Education; Council for Catholic Maintained  
Schools; Catholic Schools' Trustee Service

10 November 2021

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Chris Lyttle (Chairperson)  
Mr Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Nicola Brogan  
Mr Robbie Butler  
Mrs Diane Dodds  
Mr Daniel McCrossan  
Mr Robin Newton

**Witnesses:**

Mr Fintan Murphy	Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
Mr Gerry Campbell	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Ms Majella Corrigan	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Bishop Donal McKeown	Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I give a warm welcome and apologise for the delay to Bishop Donal McKeown, chairperson of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE); Gerry Campbell, chief executive of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); Majella Corrigan, director of school planning and provisions at the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; and Fintan Murphy, chief executive of the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS). You are very welcome, folks. I can give you up to 10 minutes for an opening statement. We will then take questions from members. Thank you.

**Bishop Donal McKeown (Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education):** Thank you very much, Chair. It is good to be here. I may have to slip out before our hour is up, because I have another engagement shortly after 11.30 am. I am here as chair of both CCMS and the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education. We are all educationalists on our side of the table. I will invite Gerry Campbell, chief executive of the CCMS, and Fintan Murphy, chief executive of CSTS, to make statements to the Committee.

Some opening comments on my part are that the Bill is, in many ways, a very radical piece of legislation and a very narrow piece of legislation. Almost everybody in Northern Ireland could sign up to clause 1(2). All our schools intentionally promote and improve on an ethos of diversity and so on. The Bill simply says that that can be promoted in only one sort of school. It is radical, if narrow, draft legislation that looks at a structure rather than an outcome. That is our starting point as we seek to create a diverse Northern Ireland.

Gerry, can I bring you in at this stage?

**Mr Gerry Campbell (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):** Thank you, Bishop, and good morning, Chair and Committee members. CCMS provided a detailed response on the Bill to the Committee. I wish to draw out some of that response in my introductory comments.

CCMS is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) that was established under the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 with a primary purpose of providing an upper tier of management for the Catholic maintained sector and raising standards in Catholic maintained schools. CCMS is the employing authority for all teachers in the Catholic maintained sector, which equates to approximately 6,500 teachers, including principals, across 447 nursery, primary, special and post-primary schools. CCMS has a number of statutory duties, including the promotion, coordination and, in consultation with the trustees of Catholic maintained schools, planning of the effective provision of such schools.

CCMS recognises, accepts and respects the right to existence of the different education sectors in Northern Ireland. That diversity should be viewed positively, given the contribution that it makes to building a cohesive society alongside ensuring that parental preferences are respected in an education system that meets the needs of all of our children. CCMS is concerned that the Bill does not appear to recognise the contribution and diversity of the Catholic maintained sector and its schools. As society in Northern Ireland becomes more secular and pluralised, parents from all backgrounds — religious, cultural and ethnic — continue to express their preference for education in Catholic schools. Some 44% of parents express a preference for that faith-based education, which delivers excellent educational outcomes and is supported by strong pastoral care structures and systems and high-quality leadership.

Catholic maintained schools and, indeed, all Catholic schools are open to all faiths and none. Catholic education is naturally inclusive and provides the opportunity for holistic growth, academic excellence and achievement for all. In a mature society, it is essential that parents, carers and learners have the freedom to exercise the right to articulate a preference for the school that best meets their needs and philosophical beliefs. Catholic schooling is not unique to Northern Ireland. Catholic schools belong to a global network of Catholic education in which pupils of all faiths and none are welcomed, cherished and supported to realise their potential, while contributing to the common good and building a better society for all.

We can all agree that the education system faces many challenges that have been exacerbated by the pressures of the COVID pandemic. However, in our view, the Bill is at odds with ensuring diversity and respect and would fundamentally create a two-tiered system of education provision. Clause 1(2) aims to broaden the meaning of integrated education to encompass:

*"diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities."*

CCMS believes that that is the role that Catholic schools play by promoting a core message of respect, diversity and inclusion in our society; indeed, the underlying philosophy and ethos of Catholic education enriches local communities and underpins the desire to create a better society for everyone. Statistics gathered from across CCMS schools show that the percentage of children who identify as Catholic ranges from 20% to nearly 100%. In addition, 33.6% of our children in Catholic maintained schools are entitled to free school meals. Furthermore, recent DE data indicated that Catholic schools are becoming the choice of many newcomer families. Some 53% of newcomer pupils attend Catholic schools, which underlines the high quality of pastoral and educational support that is available. Some 65% of Catholic schools are also involved in shared education programmes in one way or another.

Clause 4(1) proposes to place a specific duty on the Department of Education and other education bodies, including CCMS, "to encourage, facilitate and promote" integrated education. That would clearly conflict with CCMS's existing statutory duties, as outlined in the aforementioned 1989 Order. How, realistically, could CCMS be expected to fulfil those duties if it were required to promote integrated education above Catholic education in the Catholic maintained system? Surely, CCMS cannot be expected to promote two different sectors of the Northern Irish education system.

The inclusion of the word "promote" in legislation would be extremely concerning at a departmental level, as DE would effectively be required to promote one sector above all others. No such duty exists for any other education sector in Northern Ireland. It would lead to the integrated sector being elevated above other education sectors. That is simply unworkable, conflicts with the principle of parental

preference and would, ultimately, have a negative impact on the rights of parents who still wish to choose a faith-based education for their children. Again, to be absolutely clear: CCMS accepts the rights of all the other sectors to operate in Northern Ireland and for parents to be able to articulate a preference for a school in a particular sector.

The inclusion of the word "promote" is also concerning for area planning. Much work has been done to establish collaboration and partnership working across the sectors to support the progression of the departmental sustainable schools policy across all the area planning structures, with all the school sectors coming together and participating at each level of the area planning process. The area planning structures give a voice to all the sectors when they look at progressing area planning solutions. Excellent working relationships have been developed and exist on the basis of that cross-sectoral approach to area considerations. It is unclear how the current objectives of area planning and area planning processes and structures could successfully sit alongside the duty to promote one sector above all others. Furthermore, with CCMS's statutory duty to promote and coordinate with trustees the planning of effective Catholic maintained provision, the proposed requirement for CCMS to promote integrated education would conflict with our area planning duties.

Clause 7 raises similar concerns based on the proposed presumption that any new school:

*"will be an integrated school unless that would be inappropriate by reason of special circumstances."*

There is certainly a need for clarity on that clause, given the spirit subsequently outlined versus the wording as drafted. The clause runs contrary to area planning and would, if enacted, call into question the progress of a number of projects that are under consideration. CCMS remains concerned that the presumption in the clause applies to amalgamations that require the closure of existing schools and the establishment of a new school. It could also apply to all new builds in the capital programme.

I reiterate that CCMS recognises the needs of a range of sectors in any diverse society and supports the rights of parents to express their preference for a school in a particular sector. However, it is important that that is recognised as a process for expressing preference and not choice. There has been discussion on the Bill in relation to parental preference and meeting demand. It is not clear how demand would be defined or measured. However, in some discussions with the Committee thus far, that has been linked to the percentage of unsuccessful first preferences in the integrated sector. CCMS believes that the school system cannot be planned on the basis of first-choice preferences. In any area, there will always be schools that are categorised as "more popular". Other sectors could cite similar and higher percentages of unsuccessful first-preference applications.

If the operation of our system was based on meeting first-preference application demand for our most popular schools, their neighbouring schools would lose admissions and face increasing sustainability challenges, despite also offering excellent provision. Basing system planning on parental preference alone or qualifying the evidence of demand by using only first-preference data could encourage perverse incentives, as parents could assume that more applications submitted for a particular school would mean that more places would have to be approved. At post-primary level, such an approach would grow our selective schools and have a negative impact on our non-selective schools. Therefore, that remains an area of the Bill on which significant clarity is required. Any requirement to meet the demand of one sector above all others would invariably impact on enrolments elsewhere. Area planning allows all of the educational bodies to consider sustainable provision across the system as a whole and across all school types.

The timing of the Bill was concerning initially, particularly given the forthcoming independent review of education. The review panel has now been appointed and commenced its work. CCMS is engaging with the panel and will continue to do so over the next 18 months as it completes its work. The independent review should provide the opportunity to review how the Northern Ireland education system operates, including how the sectors interact and play their part in delivering educational outcomes. Ultimately, time and space needs to be afforded to the review panel so that it can engage with stakeholders, complete its report and make recommendations, without significant changes being made to legislation in advance.

That said, we are where we are. CCMS acknowledges the Committee's role in scrutinising the draft legislation. We are open and willing to work with this Committee and others, our colleagues in the Department, our other educational stakeholder partners and the Bill sponsor, Kellie Armstrong MLA, to ensure that any new legislation is workable and practical and does not conflict with existing legislation or impact negatively on the Catholic maintained sector.

I pass over to my colleague Fintan Murphy.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Gerry, can I just check your timings? We are at 11 minutes now, and I am conscious that you might want to engage with members as well. Will you be coming to a close shortly?

**Mr Fintan Murphy (Catholic Schools' Trustee Service):** I will be brief.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Thanks very much.

**Mr Murphy:** The Catholic Schools' Trustee Service was established to provide professional support to the trustees of the Catholic school sector and their role in the sector. It is in that context that we respond to the details of the Bill.

I note that the Bill defines an integrated school as:

*"a school which intentionally promotes, protects and improves an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities."*

We contend that Catholic schools and their ethos, which provides a welcome to all, meet that definition. I am sure that other sectors would argue that they, too, meet that definition.

In our submission, we looked at some of the background information to the Bill, and I will briefly comment on a few of those points. The sponsor's paper on the Bill's purpose mentions that the legislation would establish:

*"better opportunities for local interaction with the community and business."*

One of the factors that make Catholic schools so successful is that they are wholly integrated into the communities from which the children come. That includes links to the parish, cultural organisations and local business. The paper also references that the Bill would build:

*"a system of education that better reflects a society in which more and more people are defining themselves differently, taking into account the growing number of ethnic minority families and an increased number of mixed marriages and mixed relationships."*

We suggest that Catholic schools already provide for many such families and offer a welcome to all as individuals created uniquely by God. Indeed, Catholic schools are shown to be the choice of many such families, with *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality]* that 53% of all pupils who are identified as newcomers attend Catholic schools.

The background information paper also refers to:

*"Protecting local provision, especially where separate schools are under pressure."*

CSTS, working on behalf of trustees, along with the other sectoral bodies and managing authorities, recognises that, in some areas, the maintenance of local provision requires innovative solutions. Solutions already include collaborative working, shared education and shared campus projects that trustees have fully supported throughout the developments. Trustees are also committed to the further development of new and emerging models of education. We contend that such models should be based on the needs of a specific local community and not on a one-solution model for every circumstance.

Finally, I will mention the promote-and-facilitate role. CSTS believes that the right of parents exists to identify a preference for a particular school. Such a right is, obviously, extended to parents who wish to choose an integrated school. It also applies to Catholic schools, controlled schools and Irish-medium schools, for example. However, that objective in the Bill provides for preferential treatment of one sector over another and ignores the fact that, currently, over 90% of parents make a choice other than for integrated education.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Thanks very much indeed for the opening statements. Folks, I will try to keep my questions extremely brief to give other members as much opportunity as possible. Thank you for all the work that you do in education in Northern Ireland, particularly during the extremely challenging circumstances of the pandemic. I give huge thanks for and acknowledge all of that work.

You have raised issues with the Bill around "promotion" and "presumption", as other people have. Outside of those concerns, do you support the principle of improving the way in which the Department of Education and other responsible bodies identify, assess and meet pupil and parental demand for integrated education?

**Bishop McKeown:** Chris, I think that Fintan made the point that most sectors in Northern Ireland are seeking to move towards education playing a much greater integrating role. There are many schools that are not called "integrated" that are much more integrated than integrated schools. We are all committed to ensuring that we integrate education provision and allow for the choice of parents. Dominican College in Portstewart, St Columbanus' College in Bangor and St Malachy's Primary School in Bangor are heavily integrated. There are schools in mid-Ulster that are heavily integrated racially. We are all committed to integrating education as much as possible. There seems to be a mixed message, even at the beginning of the Bill, that integrated education is only what Seamus Treacy defines as integrated education. That is a problem with the drafting of the Bill.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I will rephrase the question, Bishop: do you support the principle of improving the way in which we identify, assess and meet pupil and parental demand for integrated schools?

**Bishop McKeown:** Many integrated schools are undersubscribed, and some are heavily oversubscribed. That applies for all sorts of reasons. As Fintan suggests, in some cases, people choose a school because it is the least worst school in the area. Parents want the best school in the area. When it comes to choosing which school to send their child to, you see what the vast majority of parents choose.

**Mr Campbell:** Majella wants to make a comment.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I want to comment briefly on that one as well: that is if the options are available for them to choose from. I am keen to draw out the area planning process. You touched on the definition of demand. We have also made reference to the UNESCO education centre's use of the community conversation toolkit as a community-based way to identify, assess and meet demand rather than merely using applications. I am keen to bring Majella in. Area planning works in a particular way for maintained schools. How do you see area planning working for pupils and parents who wish their children to attend integrated schools?

**Bishop McKeown:** Can Majella take that one? That is obviously her forte in CCMS.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Yes, thank you.

**Ms Majella Corrigan (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):** There are probably two parts to that question, Chair. The first part is about meeting demand. You are right to comment that it is not clear how demand would be defined or measured. The Committee has discussed unsuccessful first preferences, but it is challenging to base planning of the school system on parental preference and first-preference applications. As Gerry said, there will always be more popular schools in an area. If we look at applications for post-primary schools for this year, for example, we see that about 25% of post-primary schools had applications of 15% over their approved enrolment. That was first-preference applications only and does not take into account those made afterwards. Three quarters of those were for grammar schools, you will not be surprised to hear. If our system was based on meeting demand for first-preference applications for our most popular post-primary school, for example, one could imagine that the selective sector would grow exponentially and all neighbouring schools would lose admissions and close. That is a challenge.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That is precisely what I am asking: how do we enhance the identification, assessment and meeting of pupil and parental demand in a more interactive and robust way than that to which you refer? I use as an example the attempts of the UNESCO education centre to use techniques such as the community conversation toolkit to do that. I think that we are in agreement. I cannot apply to the school that I would prefer to attend if it does not exist in my area. I

am interested in how we enhance the identification, assessment and meeting of demand. I am keen to hear how, you think, the area planning process does that for integrated schools in comparison with Catholic maintained schools.

**Ms Corrigan:** I will finish off on the second part. The area planning process is not about an individual sector; rather, it is a cross-sector, collaborative approach with all parties at the table. All education sector bodies are represented at all stages in the area planning process. The focus in area planning, as the Minister emphasised in her statement earlier in the year, is not on an individual institution; rather, it is on provision in an area. You are right to say that everyone is working more successfully towards that.

Part of the challenge that we face is a period of demographic downturn. We will have significant capacity in our schools. A range of factors need to be looked at. Each representative body in the area planning structures is in a position to bring forward proposals to support the change in demand in its area, be that a growth or a dip. All parties can feed into that and approve actions for the area plan. That looks at long-term planning. Short-term planning is dealt with through the Department of Education's temporary variations process.

Interestingly, it is not just about first preferences. When we look at applications across schools, we see that, often, there is not a pattern. Fintan, you may want to come in on that. You do not necessarily see the same first, second, third and fourth preferences being expressed for the same type of school; people jump across. We need to do more work on what people really want and to compare what they express in surveys with how they actually apply.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK. I am keen to bring members in, but I have one last question. I really value the opportunity to interact with you on these matters.

Bishop, you set out an express aim for Catholic maintained schools to be welcoming to all and to promote diversity. Are you concerned by the extremely low percentage of Catholic maintained schools that have non-Catholic pupils?

**Bishop McKeown:** I certainly am. There are all sorts of local reasons in Northern Ireland why Catholic schools here do not reflect the pattern that you find in almost every other jurisdiction around the world where Catholic schools are the preferred option for people from outside the Catholic community. Obviously, there are local reasons here. In my time as a principal of a school, we had pupils from a nearby area who wanted to come but were threatened in their own community not to dare go near that Catholic school. There are all sorts of reasons why people will feel not included, yet places like St Columbanus' College, Loreto College in Coleraine and others have shown that they are very welcoming, even at leadership level, to those who are not from the Catholic community or have no background of that. Schools outside the Catholic sector do the same. It is quite diverse, and we are keen to ensure that Catholic schools work hard to be open to everybody and facilitate everybody.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK, thank you.

**Mr Campbell:** Catholic schools are rooted in their community. It can be challenging. A school in the heart of west Belfast, for example, will naturally draw people from that religious background. The same can apply for schools in other parts of Northern Ireland, whether in the controlled sector or whatever. Yes, we want to increase the number of pupils in Catholic schools who come from a non-Catholic background. However, society here is developing, evolving and maturing, and we are all going along at a certain pace. It cannot all be laid just on education. There are a lot of other factors in this, as our society begins to develop and mature.

**Mr Sheehan:** Thanks to everyone for their presentations. The written submissions from CSTS and CCMS are detailed and comprehensive. I will not go into those in too much detail. However, I will say that I agree in that many of us on the Committee have found aspects of the Bill problematic, particularly what I call "the two Ps": the promotion of the integrated sector above other sectors and the presumption that every new school would be an integrated school. The Bill, in its present form, would place a contradictory statutory obligation on CCMS, and that has to be changed. I believe that the proposer of the Bill recognises and acknowledges that.

More generally, there is a presumption, given the education system that we have here, that, in some way, the Catholic sector is responsible for sectarianising it. I do not believe for a minute that the

proposer of the Bill believes that, given that she is a product of the Catholic system, and nor do I believe it. How do you respond to that?

**Mr Campbell:** Thanks, Pat, for the question. I would say that, when that comes out, it is disappointing not just for Catholic schools and Catholic education but for our partners in the broader education family. Our schools, whether they be Catholic maintained, controlled, integrated or Irish-medium, all have the key focus of enabling young people to gain academic qualifications but also to develop into mature, well-balanced individuals who can make a contribution to society and, ultimately, to the economy by getting the right jobs. We try not to focus on it, because our system and our sectors all work very strongly in partnership, but it is sometimes put out there — it is nearly demeaning — in wider conversations that we have sectarianism in society and "If only we had a singular system or a single body under which every child went to a particular school". I speak for the Catholic sector, and our schools have played a strong, supportive role in the last 30 to 40 years through all the challenges that we have had in society and, in many ways, kept a lot of young men and women away from getting involved in difficult situations. I dare say that it is the same for other schools in the system.

Our schools are well led by our principals, with our teachers and our support staff. They are all there to develop our young people and to enable them to be the best individuals that they can be, whether they are Catholic, Protestant or any other denomination or of no faith at all. Our schools are there to educate. The bishop may want to come in on where the Catholic ethos adds to that, but this is something to be celebrated and respected. We do not give any apology for what a Catholic school is. As the bishop said, they exist worldwide and make a positive contribution to education, to society and to growing economies. It is the same in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the bishop will add to that.

**Bishop McKeown:** Thank you for that question —.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I am sorry to cut across you, Bishop McKeown, but that is three and a half minutes, Pat, and, as a result of a lengthy and unscheduled debate prior to this session, we are extremely tight for time. In case you have any key questions in relation to the Bill, Pat —

**Mr Sheehan:** How long have I got, Chris?

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** — you have one minute, and everybody else has about two. Go ahead.

**Mr Sheehan:** OK. Bishop McKeown —.

**Mr Murphy:** As somebody who worked in schools for many years, I know that it has always been an annoyance to schools that there is a suggestion that they are sectarian. Our schools, right back through all the difficult times that we had, were generally the organisations that came together first and brought communities together first. As a pupil in a Catholic school in the 1970s, I was involved in what you would now call "shared education" with pupils in the local controlled school at a time when, maybe, at a political level we were not ready for that. Rather than being sectarian, our schools have, for a long time, been forward-thinking centres in bringing communities together.

**Bishop McKeown:** I will come in for a quick minute, Pat. You know Mike Ritchie, who has a good analysis. He said that, when it comes to conflict anywhere in the world, there are three theologies. One is the status quo theology: get rid of the bad people, put them in jail, and we nice people get back to what we always do. The second one was reconciliation theology: bring them all together, and that will bring peace. He says that you have to look at the third one as well: the prophetic theology. It asks, in every conflict, not "Who is involved?" but "Who is benefiting?". We will never tackle sectarianism in Northern Ireland only by bringing people together, by getting Ballymurphy and Ballybeen together. We have to ask this: who benefits from sectarianism? Without that third question, the others have no legs to stand on.

**Mr Sheehan:** OK, thanks for that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Thanks, Pat. There are still members to come in, and this slot is scheduled to finish at 11.30 am. I will have to limit you to about three minutes each, which will, most likely, be one question and one answer. I regret to have to do that; it is outwith my control at this stage.

**Mr Newton:** Thank you, Chair. The fact that you have to limit us to three minutes indicates some of the concerns that were being expressed by members before we got to this evidence session on the Bill.

I welcome the delegation. I am a strong supporter of integrated education, but I believe in integrated education within the system that we have at the moment. I chose integrated education for my children at Methodist College, as it turns out.

I strongly supported shared education when I was a member of the then OFMDFM. I want to pick up on one comment. I had a number of questions, which we will not get to.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** You have used a minute already, Robin, so you might want to get to your questions.

**Mr Newton:** It was a comment from Mr Gerry Campbell. He referred to a "two-tiered system". Does the panel believe that, if the Bill progresses, your sector might be regarded as second-class educators?

**Mr Campbell:** Thank you, Robin. It is clear that, were there to be promotion of one sector above others, it would be a two-tiered system. Effectively, it would place the controlled and Irish-medium schools alongside the maintained schools and voluntary grammar schools. To be fair, I have had discussions with Kellie, and I think that she understands and appreciates the challenges faced in that. In private conversations, Kellie has not said to me that she wishes to see one sector being above everybody else. We all work together, but, in all honesty, the Department cannot have the statutory responsibility or duty to promote integrated education above everybody else. That would just tip up the apple cart and all the good work that it does.

The systems are not perfect, but we work together, and we generally try to get the right schools and the area planning at the right level for all our young people across all areas of Northern Ireland. Pushing one sector above everybody else through the draft legislation as it stands would just not work. That would bring our founding legislation from 1989 into direct conflict with a number of the statutory duties that we have, and I dare say that that would be the same for other sectors.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Time is almost up, Robin. Do you want to ask another question?

**Mr Newton:** I have another three questions, and I will just not get to them. There is no point in me posing the question and not getting an answer. Thank you to the delegation.

**Mr McCrossan:** You are most welcome, Bishop. It is good to see you. Gerry, you and your colleagues, Fintan and Majella, are also very welcome.

I will follow on from a number of points raised. In the opinion of Bishop McKeown or Gerry, would the Bill give parents seeking a place in an integrated school the right to a place, while parents seeking a place in any other sector could only state that as a preference?

**Bishop McKeown:** Is Majella the expert on planning?

**Ms Corrigan:** I would not claim to be an expert, folks, but I will address the question. It is not so much about being able to express a preference and that preference being viewed as a right but rather that, where preferences for the integrated sector are expressed, those should be met. If we follow that logic through and the same was to apply to the 25% of post-primary schools that I mentioned that have more first preferences than they are able to take, the same logic would apply there. We would basically end up with a system whereby the first-preference demand would be met, which would mean that, for various reasons, the less popular schools would lose enrolment and admissions and would face sustainability challenges. The whole idea of the preference system is that it allows parents to express preferences across schools in their area. How they order those preferences varies significantly. When it comes to policy, serious consideration would be needed when basing anything on first preferences.

**Mr McCrossan:** That is OK, thank you. I want —.

**Mr Murphy:** May I make a comment? The background information to the Bill references the 2013 Millward Brown poll. A few things came out of that poll that were not included in the preamble to the Bill. The first of those is that there were great differences in the understanding of the parents who were polled of what integrated education means. Two other factors came through when parents were asked why they choose schools. The first two reasons that they mentioned were academic reputation and proximity, not integrated status. When you talk about parental preference and try to put a school in place on the basis of parental preference, you have to work out what it is that the parents actually prefer.

**Mr McCrossan:** That is a good point. Thank you for that, Fintan.

I will move on to my next question. It is obvious that the requirements of the Bill have financial implications. Please tell us what, you think, those might amount to and how that could affect the other sectors, in particular.

**Mr Campbell:** There will be a cost relating to the judicial reviews that will come down the line to square the legislation as it stands vis-à-vis the existing legislation for other organisations. I do not have a figure for it, but a cost is highly probable, and it will have to be overcome.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That is three minutes, Daniel. Do you have a final question?

**Mr McCrossan:** I have just a final point to make, Chair. Bishop, Gerry, Fintan and Majella, we appreciate your absolute honesty on these matters. A significant number of concerns have been raised about how the legislation has been drafted and the implications that the Bill has for all sectors as a consequence. We continue to work through them.

I am a wee bit rushed today, so, although I have a number of questions, I will not enter into any further ones. Chair, I would like to see CCMS back with the Committee for a longer session so that we can explore some of the wider concerns in more detail. There are obviously quite a number of them.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I have been happy to schedule additional meetings at any stage of the Committee Stage, Daniel, and have, I think, attended every additional session that we have organised.

**Mr Butler:** Thank you, Bishop McKeown, Gerry and team. I will not use my four minutes, Chair, because I met Gerry a number of weeks ago and had a chat about the Bill. We share concerns about some of the clauses, so I do not want to spend too much time on that.

If you do not mind, guys, I will take up a little time to ask this: do you share my party's view on what integrated education should be? Hopefully, it will be picked up in the independent review of what a single education system might look like, where CCMS might sit in that and what its vision for a single education system might be. The reason why I bring it in, Chair — I make no apology for it — is that, although I can and will help to amend the Bill if the independent review does not deliver a single education system, from my perspective, if the Bill goes through, we will have a further segmented sector. I am not sure that the Bill will do what it says on the tin. Will you give me your opinion on what a single education system might look like?

**Mr Murphy:** I will comment on that. We argue that we have a single education system. A single Department of Education produces policy, and different types of school work to deliver that policy. That provides parents with the opportunity to have a preference. We have a community in Northern Ireland that is becoming much more pluralist and multicultural; in particular, a lot of the new people who are coming in are brought here on the basis that we respect diversity and choice. It is a strange situation to have a much more pluralist, multicultural society but then say, "You can have only one type of school".

**Mr Butler:** One of my thoughts on that goes back to Pat Sheehan's comment at the start about how we move Northern Ireland forward holistically. I agree that the problem is perhaps not about where our kids are educated. It not simply about segregated education, because they live in segregated communities and possibly just go to the school that is closest to them.

If we are looking at other avenues for a single education system, might we need to look at a single curriculum? We have a common curriculum, but, let us be honest, different things are taught in different schools. Should there be more commonality across key subjects?

Finally — this may be a bit more controversial, so excuse me for saying it — we also need to deal with the issue of teacher exemption. Will anyone speak about that? It is something else that we need to tackle.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Robbie, I gave you three minutes to ask questions on the Bill, and you have circumnavigated all the key issues of education. *[Laughter.]* Folks, please give a brief response, if you can.

**Bishop McKeown:** May I come in on the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO), Chair, if you do not mind?

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Go ahead.

**Bishop McKeown:** FETO and the whole religious discrimination thing is a product of the 1990s, when it was assumed that everyone in Northern Ireland was a Catholic or a Protestant. We have to look at the 2020s and see how we can ensure that we avoid discrimination against people yet allow for diversity. If we are going down the road of one sector only, you cannot ask people in an Irish-medium school, an integrated school or a Catholic school, "Are you committed to our ethos?". There has to be some form of legislation that replaces FETO and enables diversity to be cherished, not feared.

**Ms Corrigan:** Robbie, I am not entirely sure that this completely answers what you asked about how we move the system on, but I was looking at some information just yesterday about where differing attainment levels can be shown in our community. Obviously, we want to make sure that every child achieves to their very best. When we look at the differences across Protestant and Catholic, male and female, free school meals and non-free school meals and selective versus non-selective, we see that the most significant gap by quite a lot is the attainment of selective and non-selective pupils. The review should focus on ensuring that every child gets an equal opportunity in their education to get the best education that they can and on trying to deal with some of the attainment gap that we see in some of our schools.

**Mr Murphy:** On the issue of the curriculum, it is a bit of a disappointment that the Bill references that integrated education might create an equal quality of education. It does not reference high-quality education, which is what we need to work towards. We, as a system, should have conversations about the curriculum, the quality of the education and how it prepares pupils for their lives and the economy that we have to develop.

**Mr Butler:** Good point. Thank you.

**Bishop McKeown:** I want to leave at this stage for another meeting. Is that possible?

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Yes. Thanks very much indeed for your time.

**Bishop McKeown:** I am sorry, but I have another engagement. I am happy to meet you again at any stage. Thank you, everybody.

**Mrs Dodds:** Thank you to everyone. Apologies for keeping you waiting. The Chair is being generous today, but he would probably say that it is my fault.

You highlighted many issues about the Bill that have been highlighted repeatedly during the evidence sessions that the Committee has had. What is your view of how the Bill would impact on the drive towards shared education? I was at my local high school in Banbridge and then St Patrick's College in Banbridge. It was amazing to see the diversity of uniforms walking about the corridor in both of those schools. That is a great example of sharing in the curriculum. How would that be impacted by the Bill?

**Mr Murphy:** There are a few issues in that regard. The Department is working on a process for mainstreaming shared education for all schools. If it were happy to divert its energies to promoting a particular sector, the time and energy spent on things such as shared education and the finance involved might be diminished on the basis that the Department would be forced to put more energy and funding in to the promotion of one sector.

**Ms Corrigan:** As the bishop said, there are many ways in which our children integrate in our schools. It does not need to be under the title of "integration". The shared education programme is an example

of that. It is important to recognise that that is a programme and that that programme is available to all sectors. All sectors participate in it. The outworkings of that are very positive. We need to be careful that that area is not damaged by any changes that are made in the intervening period.

**Mrs Dodds:** I completely agree.

I have spoken to you individually about some of the other issues. One of the contributions really chimed with me: we really need to look at the quality of education, how we can improve it and how we can create more flexibility in the curriculum to address the needs of the economy and the prospects for young people and schoolchildren at a later stage. I worry that we divert our attention from that at times.

**Mr Campbell:** You are right, Diane: we need to do that. You hear it mentioned so many times in the 14-19 strategy and the engagement between the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy, but we need to look at what skills are required to develop and to enhance our economy. What are the jobs of tomorrow?

**Mrs Dodds:** Yes.

**Mr Campbell:** Can we equip our young people through our education system, as it stands, and provide that flexibility and ease of negotiation between leaving school and going on to a further education college, a university or an apprenticeship? Developing all the skills that people need is good for the individual, the community and, ultimately, the wider economy.

**Mrs Dodds:** I want us to focus on what the curriculum needs to do and how it needs to change to deliver that, particularly at Key Stage 3, and how we can increase sharing in schools across the curriculum needs, so that we have the broadest and most flexible offer for all young people across our community.

**Ms Brogan:** Thank you to everyone who has come along this morning. We have covered most of the main topics. I definitely share the concerns that Gerry outlined specifically about clause 5 and the use of the word "promotion" and the presumption in clause 7 that all new schools will be integrated schools. The word "promotion" elevates integrated education above other sectors, and that is wholly unfair. As already discussed, the Bill sponsor, Kellie Armstrong, has taken that on board, and, hopefully, changes will be made to that.

I want to touch on the independent review of education. The panel has recently been appointed. I want your opinions on that. What difficulties do you see, if we were to proceed with the Bill in advance of the independent review and its findings?

**Mr Campbell:** To be fair, Nicola, in our submission and in the conversations that we have had with Committee members, we have been clear that our view is that the independent review needs to complete its work. We are where we are. The Committee will work its way through the scrutiny of the draft legislation as it sits. We will work with the Committee, colleagues in DE and other sectoral organisations to support the Committee as part of that process, but our view is that there is an independent review. The Minister announced the panel towards the end of September, and the panel commenced its work on 4 October. We understand that there will be a period of around 18 months before it will finally make recommendations in its report. We will work on that. A lot of things need to be examined and considered in that review. Our view was that the Bill would have been unhelpful in advance of the review taking place. As I said in my opening remarks, we are where we are. The Committee is working its way through the draft legislation, and we will work with colleagues in relation to how things progress.

**Ms Brogan:** To be honest, I share those concerns, Gerry. I am afraid that it is doubling up the work, which will have to be reimagined after the findings from the review. I share those concerns. That is all from me. Thank you very much to the three of you.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** My sincere thanks to all the witnesses for their contributions as part of the session. Daniel mentioned additional meetings. I am happy to make myself available for those, if that is desirable. We are extremely grateful for the written and oral evidence that you have provided us with today. We will take that into close consideration for the Committee Stage of the Bill. Thank you.