



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Integrated Education Bill: Controlled Schools'
Support Council

11 November 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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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 Justin McNulty
Mr Robin Newton

Witnesses:

Mr Mark Baker	Controlled Schools' Support Council
Ms Jayne Millar	Controlled Schools' Support Council

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Sheehan): I welcome Mr Mark Baker, chief executive of the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC), and Ms Jayne Millar, CSSC's head of education support. You will have 10 minutes to make an opening statement, and that will be followed by questions from members, which either of you can answer. The floor is yours, so go ahead. Thanks.

Mr Mark Baker (Controlled Schools' Support Council): Thank you, Deputy Chair. I assume that you can hear us OK; you will tell us if you cannot.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk on behalf of controlled schools about this very important Bill, to which we have given significant consideration over the past four months. I ask for some patience; I will try to hit 10 minutes, but I am sure that you will guide me, Pat, if you need me to move on or move more quickly.

At the outset, we would like to state clearly that the Controlled Schools' Support Council is fully committed to educating children and young people from all community backgrounds together. Indeed, that is the fundamental premise of the controlled sector. CSSC is a voluntary body that was set up in September 2016 to represent and support the interests of the controlled sector and, in so doing, address its historical deficit. We support controlled schools, which are open to all faiths and none, in providing high-quality education for children and young people in order to enable them to learn, develop and grow together within the ethos of non-denominational Christian values and principles.

The diversity of the controlled sector is evident in the age of the pupils whom it serves — they are aged from 3 to 19 — as well as in the types and locations of the schools that it represents. It celebrates the inclusion of nursery, primary, special and post-primary schools in its wide-reaching community, welcoming all young people, whoever they are and wherever they come from.

The controlled sector is the largest education sector in Northern Ireland, accounting for 49% of all schools and catering for 146,138 pupils. The inclusivity of the controlled sector is further demonstrated by our controlled integrated and controlled Irish-medium schools. Those schools are no less controlled than any other type of school in the sector. We value and support those schools to the same extent as we do all other controlled schools. They contribute to the rich diversity that exists in the sector. The controlled integrated schools' transformation process provides an opportunity to access additional support, to promote their integrated status and, ultimately, to demonstrate more explicitly to communities that they welcome children from both traditional backgrounds or all faiths and none, as is the case for all controlled schools.

CSSC has been concerned about misunderstanding about and, in some cases, the misrepresentation of the controlled sector. Controlled schools are sometimes erroneously referred to as Protestant schools. We welcome the opportunity to dispel that myth and, in the context of the Bill, to provide the following robust and accurate evidence regarding the controlled sector. Fewer than two thirds of pupils in controlled schools are Protestant. The latest census figure shows the sector as 61% Protestant, 10% Catholic and 29% other. Over half of primary and post-primary controlled schools have more than 30% of pupils identifying as Catholic or other. A number of controlled schools have a higher proportion of Catholic pupils compared with Protestant pupils. Some 39.5% of newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland attend controlled schools, and 28% of controlled pupils are entitled to free school meals. Those are increasing trends that support the fact that controlled schools welcome children from all backgrounds and are therefore not Protestant schools.

That sectoral profile underpins our endorsement of the Executive's support for educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom. The controlled sector continues to contribute significantly to that aim and has much to contribute towards building a shared society. Our organisation seeks to raise awareness of shared education amongst controlled schools by encouraging and facilitating their participation. Some 48% of schools that are actively involved in shared education partnerships are controlled schools.

You may think, therefore, that our opening remarks suggest that CSSC would have no concerns about the Bill, but, unfortunately, that is not the case. CSSC has given the Bill significant consideration over the past four months, and its implications for the controlled sector and the wider education system have been discussed by our council. CSSC, in representing the interests of the controlled sector, has grave concerns about some of the content and potential ramifications of the Bill should it be accepted into law in its current form. If the Bill becomes law, all other grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland will be placed in a secondary position to integrated schools.

CSSC welcomes the independent review of education. We believe that, prior to that fundamental review, it would be inappropriate to progress legislation that will elevate an individual sector above all others. It is difficult to see how the proposal for the legislation, in advance of the review reporting, is compatible with an objective and transparent review that sets out a vision for education for the future. If we are to truly transform our education system, we must work together with a clear focus on equality in raising standards and improving the quality of education for all our children and young people.

We will now briefly outline our concerns about specific aspects of the Bill. Clause 1 represents a fundamental change and a dilution of the existing legislative definition of integrated education, which gives integrated education its distinctive character. As already demonstrated, controlled schools welcome pupils from different cultures, pupils with religious beliefs or none, pupils from all backgrounds and pupils of different abilities. The definition of integrated education proposed in the Bill applies to a wide range of education and duplicates that which already exists in the controlled sector.

Clause 2 outlines the purpose of integrated education. The five points listed represent the purpose of controlled education and, we believe, should also be the purpose of all grant-aided education in Northern Ireland.

Clause 4 proposes to extend the existing statutory requirements on the Department and the Education Authority (EA) to:

"encourage, facilitate and promote integrated education."

The promotion requirement and the meaning given in clauses 4 and 5 have significant implications for the controlled sector and the children and young people who attend schools in that sector. Currently, the Department and the EA do not promote one sector over another. Resource invested in the promotion of integrated education, as required by the Bill, would be at the expense of other sectors

and, more importantly, the children and young people in those schools. As the sectoral support body for controlled schools, we expect equal and fair consideration to be given to the needs of the 146,000 children and young people in controlled schools.

Clause 5 also has significant implications for area-planning policy and process. The aim of area planning is to ensure that all primary and post-primary pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is educationally and financially viable and sustainable. In its outworkings, the Bill would make area planning unworkable. The Department requires the statutory planning authorities — the EA and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) — school managing authorities and sectoral support bodies to identify current and future educational needs and to develop solutions to meet those needs on an area basis. All sectors are represented in area-planning structures at all levels. Those structures provide a forum for cooperation and agreement between all sectors. The promotion of integrated education as outlined in the Bill requires the Department to identify, assess and monitor the need for integrated schools and places a further requirement on the Department to aim to increase demand and to provide sufficient places in order to meet that demand. That is contrary to the fundamental principles of area planning, and its outworkings would threaten sustainability in controlled schools.

Together with clause 7, clause 5 has significant implications not only for the sustainability of controlled schools but for all sectors and the public purse. The disregard of the religious demographics of an area or spare places in existing schools contradicts the purpose of integrated education as proposed and outlined in clause 2 to:

"promote the efficient and effective use of resources".

CSSC finds clause 7 unacceptable. It overrides the area-planning process, through which CSSC, working with the EA, represents the interests of the controlled sector. To apply the presumption that, on establishment, a new school will be an integrated school unless inappropriate does not consider the views of the wider community. The assumption in the Bill is that all parents want an integrated school as the default solution. That impacts on parental preference and appears to devalue all education other than integrated.

Under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, provision is made for parents to express a preference for the school or schools that they wish their children to attend. If the Department invested in the promotion of integrated education, as required by the Bill, it would be detrimental to parents who express a preference for other sectors. Parental preference is complex and is a tangled interplay of personal values, aspirations and pragmatic decisions.

The Ulster University 'Community Conversation' report on south Belfast in March 2019 considered facts that influence primary-school preference. The evidence indicated that parents consistently identified quality of education as a key factor affecting their decisions on primary-school preference, with 67% ranking that above school sector and ethos, which was 26%, and distance to school, which was 6%.

While some polls point to significant support for integrated schools, it is important to remember that the input of individual parents to a particular school is, by its nature, relatively short term, but educational planning needs long-term perspectives and continuity. A balance is needed between the right to exercise individual, possibly shifting and, at times, unpredictable preference and the maintenance of a stable base for a long-term educational strategy. Parents have remained loyal to existing good schools, because what they overwhelmingly seek is a good school. The quality of educational outcomes must be the focus of the attention, rather than individual sectors or any political interests.

It is difficult to see how other educational bodies could include provision for integrated education in their strategies, plans and policies, as proposed in clause 6. That is an unreasonable and unworkable request for a number of the designated educational bodies. It will create tension between the bodies that will be counterproductive to promoting unity in education and will lead to costly judicial reviews.

Linked to that, clause 3 requires that in any function that the Department of Education seeks to carry out, it is required to consult with any body that includes in its objectives the provision of support and advice to the Department in its promotion of integrated education. The assumption is that that body would be the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). CSSC considers it to be a clear conflict of interest that the Department would be required to consult with NICIE, as one of several sectoral bodies, on our funding and programme of work.

Clause 8 requires the Department to "prepare, publish and maintain" an integrated education strategy. The existing duty on the Department to "facilitate and encourage" the development of integrated education already provides for actions to be taken by the Department and the EA for integrated schools that do not have to be taken for other schools. The active promotion of integrated education by the Department and the Education Authority effectively undermines the essential functions and purposes of shared education, which are to bring together children of different backgrounds through collaboration across our school system, including all school types, where each is equally valued. Shared education policy sits within a broader education policy framework that is designed to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people and to tackle identified educational underachievement, rather than the advancement and promotion of one sector above all others.

In the context of the Department's budget being constrained by significant underfunding — as members will note, last week, the Department estimated that it will have inescapable pressures of £350 million in the next financial year — the costs associated with the Bill are a significant concern for CSSC. Funding must be prioritised to meet the needs of the child, not a single type of school above all others. CSSC is committed to ensuring that there is equality of treatment for all and for every child in the controlled sector, alongside every child in other sectors. We want to see —

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Sheehan): Mark, apologies for interrupting you. We are pressed for time this morning, and you have had about 12 minutes so far. I will give you another minute to wrap it up.

Mr Baker: That is fine. I was about to say the words "in conclusion", Pat. Thank you for your patience.

In its current form, the Bill fails to acknowledge the diversity of the controlled sector and its ethos of being open to all. The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) priority to:

"support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom."

is delivered on a daily basis not only at controlled schools but through their participation in shared education partnerships.

As outlined, there are potential wider implications and unintended consequences arising from the Bill, not least for area planning and the future make-up of the school estate. CSSC contends that the prioritisation of one group of schools over all others would have an adverse effect on the quality of education provision and educational outcomes for children and young people in all other schools and would erode much of the progress that has been made in building good community relations.

To conclude — finally, finally, Pat — the Bill comes at a point where the education system in Northern Ireland is undergoing an extensive independent review. We welcome that review. Therefore, it is wholly inappropriate at this time to propose substantial changes to one aspect of the education system. Through engagement on the Bill, we have been heartened by statements made by all sectors about schools being open to all and the need for inclusion. We contend that, through sectors collaborating and working closely together through the various area-planning processes and through schools being actively involved in shared education programmes, the NDNA aim can be delivered. Prioritising one sector above all others does not facilitate that work.

Thank you for your patience.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Sheehan): Thank you for that, Mark.

I am going to hand back to our Chair, who has arrived. He was delayed slightly. I will hand over to Chris.

(The Chairperson [Mr Lyttle] in the Chair)

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thanks for stepping in, Pat. I will ask a couple of quick questions, and then I will hand back to you. Thanks for your opening remarks, folks. I have to make a short comment at the outset to say that the suggestion that the Bill, or its proposer, devalues all education other than integrated education is very unhelpful and very inaccurate.

Mark, do you think that the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement elevates integrated education?

Mr Baker: Chris —. Will you excuse me if I call you "Chris" and not "Chair"?

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Absolutely.

Mr Baker: I will leave it to politicians to address the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and a number of other political agreements. I am not an expert on the Good Friday Agreement, Chris. However, it promotes, rightly, inclusive education for our children, the open nature of our schools and our children and young people being educated together. That is not a sectoral state, Chris; it is a status. As you heard yesterday from the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC), the controlled sector is open to all. We firmly state that as well. The controlled sector delivers on a daily basis on what the Good Friday Agreement proposes and promotes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I am starting to get a wee bit concerned about the revisionism that appears to be going on. The agreement does not reference children being educated together; it references "integrated education". You, rightly, referred to some other documents. The tackling paramilitarism task force called on the Executive to put specific and measurable targets in place for integrated education, and the 'New Decade, New Approach' report uses the language that you have referred to about children being educated together. Multiple documents have set out a need for the advancement of integrated education.

How do you think area planning is working, and how do you think it is meeting demand for integrated education?

Mr Baker: As you are aware, area planning is a cross-sectoral process that looks at area solutions. Colleagues from the NICIE are involved at all levels, as are colleagues from all other sectors. The planning for the school estate and the provision in it is carried out throughout that process. Could area planning be improved as a process? There is no doubt that it could. There are constant ongoing moves to do that.

Success, Chris, must not be around solely integrated education. Area planning is about providing quality education and planning for the future educational needs of, ultimately, Northern Ireland and the children and young people who are our future. The question of whether it meets the needs of integrated education is, I suggest, more an issue for NICIE, given its role in area planning.

Can I make one point, Chris? I am not an expert on the Good Friday Agreement, and neither is my body, in any way whatsoever. I suggest that the intention of integrated education is the education of our children and young people together. Is that not the purpose of integrated education? It is the purpose in the Bill. We firmly agree with those purposes, Chris, which is why we believe that all grant-aided schools should be so. The Bill states, potentially, that a type of school should be prioritised, and that needs to be clarified. Surely we should be working with all schools, Chris.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. I just found it strange that you could not refer to the fact that the Good Friday Agreement calls on us to "facilitate and encourage integrated education". You do not need to be an expert to know that; you just need to have read the agreement.

This is my last question. I accept that any school that we have spoken to absolutely has the stated aim of being open to all, but, if DE figures suggest that only around 15% of our schools have at least 10% of pupils from a Catholic background and 10% from a Protestant background, how well are we achieving those aims?

Mr Baker: Again, Chris, that comes down to what success is and what the definition of an "integrated school" is. We referred to the Bill removing the thresholds for an integrated school — the targets, as it were. The Bill actually defines integrated education as schools that are "intentionally" open to all, and we agree with that and support it 100%. The Bill does not, however, say that 10% is good, 15% is good or 20% is good. It is about the status of the school. As I am sure Committee members have heard frequently over the last number of days, we are surely not talking about bussing our children around cities in order to ensure that one school has a balance or otherwise. It is about the ethos of the school, Chris. That ethos runs throughout the school and includes, most importantly, respect for all throughout what happens in the school. That is at the heart of what a school that is open to all should be and at the heart of what inclusive education should be.

If success is defined by numbers, there are challenges across all schools with the numbers of pupils from different backgrounds who are attracted to them. That includes integrated schools. What is

success? It is not numbers, Chris. It is about the ethos and attitude of the children and young people as they progress through the school system and into our society. Surely that is the case.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It is probably about the make-up of boards of governors and other things as well. Yes, absolutely. We can get into those issues as well. I have used my time, so I will pass on to the Deputy Chairperson, Pat Sheehan MLA.

Mr Sheehan: Thanks again, Mark and Jayne. I am not someone who believes that integrated education is a panacea for all the ills that we face as a society. Instinctively, however, the vast majority of us would like to see our children mix and be educated with children from different political, cultural and religious backgrounds and be able to do that freely.

Most surveys find that up to 80% of people are in favour of integrated education. If we say that we will allow that integration to happen organically, we will be here talking about the same thing in another 100 years' time. This is the question that I have for you, Mark: why should the integrated sector not be given a privileged position? Why should it not be given a leg up, if that is what most of us in society want? I accept your point that it is not just about integration but about good-quality education, but why should resources not be directed in that direction? Thanks.

Mr Baker: Thank you for your question, Pat. It is very important to consider the opinions of parents, communities and wider society — of course it is.

I am not going to get into opinion polls, because I am certainly not going to question methodology in any way whatsoever. As you stated, the poll results are clear, evident and consistent. Our question has to be this: is it just one type of school that is deemed to be integrated, which, at the moment, is a grant-maintained integrated or a controlled integrated? Is it just one type of school that can deliver on that integrated, with a small i, education? We firmly state that controlled schools are open to all; controlled schools are inclusive. We believe that, daily, the population's desires are met.

We need investment across our whole system on a number of levels. It is not that the integrated sector should be prioritised, Pat, but that inclusion, diversity, shared education and integration should be equally promoted across the system, without the danger of overly promoting and — when we have a significant pressure of £350 million next year — investing in one sector, potentially, at the expense of others. That is our concern. We are talking about equality. We firmly state that all schools should promote the education of our children together, alongside our colleagues in integrated schools. I hope that that answers your question in some way, Pat.

Mr Sheehan: Those involved in the integrated sector have told us that the ethos in their schools will be about inclusivity and cultural diversity — not some neutral culture but one that incorporates all cultures. Around this time of the year, Mark, poppies are very evident in controlled schools. They are available and are sold in many the schools, but the same facility is not made available, for example, for Easter lilies to commemorate those who sacrificed their lives in the fight for Irish freedom. How can you talk about inclusivity and cultural diversity when you operate a system that is exclusive?

Mr Baker: That is a very interesting area, Pat, as I am sure that you are aware. I would be concerned if our schools were seen to promote one specific understanding of our past and our desire of a future together. Clearly, controlled schools draw from the communities in which they are based. In those communities, they have the challenge not only of supporting the wishes and desires of the local community and supporting the culture that, yes, many of the people in that community come from but of promoting diversity. Are there more things to learn, Pat? Of course there are. Investment in how we move forward in those areas is what is needed. Education is not black and white in this context. We need to move to a situation where inclusivity is truly understood and valued. What does that look like? Communities have to be part of that conversation, do they not?

Mr Sheehan: If you are talking about inclusion and you are telling us that controlled schools are, in fact, integrated, surely you are not talking about just one community.

Mr Baker: No, we are not; we are talking about all the communities that are represented in the school and about having that understanding.

Pat, I do not have figures to hand and I have not been in a school for the past couple of days, so I cannot tell you which controlled schools, at this time of year, are celebrating Remembrance Sunday and what controlled schools do at other times of the year. I do not want to make assumptions, Pat, in

any way. Should controlled schools be inclusive and diverse? Of course they should. It is about how we move that forward together and how we learn together about what to do in that context.

Mr Sheehan: Thanks for that.

Mr Newton: I thank CSSC — Mark and Jayne — for coming along today. Apologies for being a few minutes late in joining the meeting. I probably share the ethos that Mark outlined. I support integrated education and want to see all our children educated together. It would be wonderful if we had only one education system, but we are not there. Today's evidence, and the concerns that have been relayed, are very much in line with what we heard yesterday. There has maybe been a bit more passion today, but that is not a bad thing.

I have two questions. Mark mentioned that CSSC was very much on board for a shared society. Most of us are on board for that. Can Mark expand a bit more on a shared society and shared education? Mark indicated that CSSC has grave concerns about the Bill and its ramifications. Mark mentioned the potential for judicial reviews. Can Mark and Jayne expand on those two points?

Mr Baker: Thank you, Robin. As I have done in the past, I am very happy to talk to the Committee about shared education. It is worth stating that, in the past, I was heavily involved in various shared education projects. Shared education is a process whereby all schools work closely together across a number of areas to educate our children and young people together but also to address key issues of educational outcomes, underachievement, the provision of the curriculum across area communities and building strong relationships between schools and, therefore, the communities that they represent. Shared education is a more ground-up approach. As your colleague Diane Dodds stated yesterday, the variety of uniforms that go in and out of our schools on a daily basis is very positive because it is indicative of a shared society. Schools should be shared spaces. Therefore, the education of our children and young people together, whilst retaining the specific ethos of their own schools and communities but sharing those to celebrate the differences, is really important.

Is there more to be done on shared education? Of course, there is. It is not a finished product. More than half of controlled schools are involved in shared education partnerships, but more partnerships need to be developed. I hope that the Education Authority will be able to address that, given that it is the role that it plays. Shared education is a fundamental part of how we address our shared future. If our children and young people are educated together and are frequently in and out of one another's schools, we hope that a clear message is given to communities that our schools are shared spaces and that there is a shared future together.

As for financial implications and judicial reviews, our concern is specifically about the establishment of new schools that are integrated by default. What will that mean for the definition of integrated? If an inclusive controlled school that is open to all is to be established in an area, does that count as an integrated school? There is the potential for a judicial review to challenge the definition of an integrated school. We firmly believe that the definitions of integrated education in the Bill are, potentially, open to challenge. Resources will be diverted away from children and young people in all schools at a time when there are significant issues with underachievement and significant underfunding. Committee members will have heard evidence from the Department of Education about the level of funding for all pupils in schools. We need equality. Funding needs to be directed at need.

The problem with the Bill is that it has wide-ranging implications. At heart, its intentions are sound: promoting our children and young people being educated together. The complexity must be left to the independent review —

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Sorry to cut across you, Mark. I just want to make sure that Robin knows his time. That is five minutes, Robin. Do you want to ask a final question? I am sorry, Mark. It is just that we are on tight timings.

Mr Baker: I understand, Chair.

Mr Newton: I will be quite happy for Mark to finish the point that he was making.

Mr Baker: It is about ensuring equality. Our funding needs to be addressed at the point of need. Whilst the Bill is, at its core, well intentioned, and whilst we agree with the purposes of integrated education at that core, the wider elements of it must be left to an independent review. It is too complex to be dealt with in this manner.

Mr Newton: I thank Mark for those comments. The independent review is a major factor in where the Bill goes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Mark, I will ask a very quick question on shared education. In what ways are the extent and impact of shared education measured and reported?

Mr Baker: I am very happy to answer quickly, but I suggest that you direct the question to the Education Authority because it is the lead body. There is significant peer-reviewed evidence on shared education, as you are aware, and there is biennial reporting to the Department under the Shared Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2016. Chris, there is more work to be done there — you know that — as there is across the board.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK.

Mr McCrossan: Thank you, Mark, for your opening remarks and the detailed responses to questions. Very quickly, I make the point that I am a product of the controlled sector. I attended Strabane Primary School. It was the local school, the nearest to where my parents lived. I would always claim that I benefited from one of the most naturally integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The benefits of it were endless. Children from all backgrounds were educated together. I want to put that firmly on the record. I am a good supporter, and always have been, of the controlled sector.

That having been said, as other members said earlier, demand is growing for integrated education and for more progress on expanding the sector and ensuring that children are educated together. All of us aspire to that. It is about breaking down the barriers of the past, in education and housing and in other elements of society.

The Bill is far from perfect, and my concerns about how it has been drafted are on the record. I firmly believe in integrated education, but how we get there is an entirely different matter, and this Bill presents difficulties as we have heard from you, CCMS and many others. Do you believe that integrated education has been disadvantaged over the years? Are you aware of a mechanism or process that can provide us with an accurate audit of the real needs in an area?

Mr Baker: Thank you for your comments, Daniel, specifically about Strabane controlled primary school. I have visited that school on a number of occasions, but not when you were there. I share some of your concerns.

With regard to community conversations and audits of areas, do we have the solution? No, we do not. We firmly believe that we need communities, along with the children and young people, to be part of conversations about the solutions in education in their area. It needs to be a community conversation. How community conversations work is a different matter, and I think that that process has not yet been agreed upon. How do you audit changing attitudes in communities and identify need? One of our concerns about the Bill is the fact that it is the Department's role to promote the need, to create demand and also to meet that demand. I do not know how that actually happens on the ground. Unfortunately, Daniel, I cannot give you a solution. What I can say is that we are firmly committed to communities being involved and parental preference being respected.

Your first point was about whether integrated schools have been disadvantaged. Let us not underestimate the significant work carried out by parents in setting up grant-maintained integrated schools. I am sure that their stories will clearly state their concerns about how that process is gone through. My role here must be to talk about any disadvantage that is there for the controlled sector. That is our concern: we may be perceived to be part of the problem and not a key part of the solution. We must all work together to deliver on the solution across all sectors. I may have gone across a number of areas there, Daniel, but I hope that I have given you some understanding of our concerns.

Mr McCrossan: In your opinion, what would clause 7 do for parental preference?

Mr Baker: Yesterday, you heard from colleagues in CCMS and others. The presumption here is that a new school must be an integrated school unless there are special circumstances. If the parental preference is that it is not an integrated school — the parental preference in the area is that it is a Catholic maintained, controlled or Irish-medium school — how does that work? The presumption and default position here is integrated first. The presumption is already that parental preference is for an integrated school. Parental preference is for a high-quality school; it is for good schools. Schools must be inclusive and open to all: we know that. However, the process here is a reverse one. We should

work to ensure that schools are inclusive and open to all, and that, therefore, all schools meet that requirement. All schools should meet the purposes of integration, as stated in the Bill. That is how it would affect parental preference, Daniel.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Daniel, that is six minutes. Can you make a final point, please? Thanks.

Mr McCrossan: Concerns have been expressed by witnesses in previous sessions that the Bill could be open to a significant number of judicial reviews if it goes ahead in its current form. Do you share that view? I have a brief supplementary question. As a body, are you satisfied with the level of consultation that the Bill sponsor has initiated with you on the Bill?

Mr Baker: We have to be concerned about judicial reviews. You, as legislators, must be concerned about judicial reviews. Again, the concern is not about the intention in the Bill for how our children will be educated; it is about the need for precision, the definitions and the wider implications that would result in judicial reviews, which are costly and time-consuming.

Are we satisfied with the level of consultation with the sponsor? I had a positive meeting with Kellie Armstrong after the Second Stage. The meeting was at our request. As you would imagine, there were some key areas of agreement between us on the importance of children and young people being educated together. Some concerns were raised. For the past four months, we have looked and consulted elsewhere. We have concerns. I am not sure what consultation took place before the Bill's First Stage. I was not in post before that. Moreover, CSSC did not exist before 2016. However, we should work together on what the Bill looks like, not potentially create something that may cause concerns for other sectors. I want to support our children and young people being educated together, as does the organisation that I represent.

Mr Butler: Thank you for your presentation, guys. It was very interesting. I genuinely think that the Committee has engaged with the Bill proactively and that we can get somewhere with it. The Bill has potential, but I share many of the fears that you outlined, particularly over clauses 3 and 7. The Bill sponsor has indicated, certainly verbally, that she is prepared to work with us on a number of the issues.

I am becoming increasingly interested in the absolute truth behind education in Northern Ireland. I keep needing to tease that out. Some of it is not being teased out. In a lot of the parental surveys, the question "Do you want integrated education in Northern Ireland?" is asked. I suggest that, if we were to do a survey today, we would probably get 90% to 95% of people saying that they want integrated education. When one gets into the detail of what people understand integrated education to be, however, it gets slightly more complex.

Over the past few weeks, I have asked a number of questions, and I am now starting to form a bit of a picture. I suggest that the number-one priority for integrated education is to educate children from different backgrounds together. That should be everybody's number-one priority. The second priority, possibly, is the ethos of the school. The third priority may be the board of governors. The Chair reminded me yesterday that it is that entirely. I get that, but there is a sliding scale of priorities.

When we look at some of the figures that are coming out about how our children are currently educated, I would hazard a guess that the controlled sector stacks up pretty darn well. You shared some figures that indicated that less than two thirds of pupils in that sector come from the majority community in that area, I suspect. Departmental figures on the integrated sector that were revealed to us yesterday show that 75% of integrated schools fail to have 30% of pupils from a minority community. I am just asking the question, not suggesting it, because I accept the Chair's point that integrated education is about more than just the figures, but, if that is the case, is it fair to say that controlled schools have shown that, by their nature, they are perhaps even more integrated than integrated schools?

Mr Baker: Thank you for, as always, a very simple question, Robbie. *[Laughter.]* As you said, it is a very complex picture. What people understand integrated education to be when they answer polls about it and what Committee members understand an integrated school to be are not clear and precise things. Everybody understands that, when we talk about integrated education, we are talking about our children and young people being educated together. That is important, but the important thing in the Bill, and for you as legislators, is that you need to be clear about what is and what is not an integrated school.

I think that your question is on whether the controlled sector is outperforming the integrated sector when it comes to integration. I am —

Mr Butler: I am talking about pupil numbers in the higher sense. Lots of numbers are being bandied about at the moment. It is —

Mr Baker: I do not have a comparative study, but what I can tell you is that I am very confident that, when it comes to controlled schools, the ethos is one that is open to all, and the figures demonstrate that they are open to all. I am also very clear that we all know that we have work to do. That applies as much to an integrated school as it does to a controlled school or a Catholic maintained school. One of the things that we welcome in the Bill is the potential for development funding and for the role of the inspectorate. We support that in order to improve inclusion.

Robbie, I am not going to tell you that the controlled sector outperforms the integrated sector, because I do not have the data in order to tell you that. I can tell you what one of my colleagues also said to you yesterday, and it is that I firmly believe that the controlled sector needs to step up and demonstrate that it is the sector that is open to all and that we should be challenged to work with other sectors.

Mr Butler: No problem. In some ways, the Bill poses questions of complexity and legal compliance, and it may be open to judicial review. I would like to see ambitious targets set for all sectors for educating our children together. The lack of targets negates the first priority, which is to educate our children together. Every sector should be faced with meeting those targets, and not just the integrated sector but the controlled and maintained sectors: the whole lot. We say that publicly and, indeed, privately. We all agree that our children should be educated together. In Northern Ireland society, we have other barriers to that, including where we live, transport and those types of things.

I would like a little bit of clarification. Can you better inform me a wee bit about the scale of controlled Irish-medium and controlled integrated schools and about where and what they are? To be honest, I am just picking up on things through hearing about them. I would be very interested to hear about them.

Mr Baker: I would be very happy to give you that —

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are you happy enough for that to be your final question, Robbie? Just in case you want to ask anything else.

Mr Butler: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

Mr Baker: I would be very happy to provide you and the Committee with that information separately. There are two controlled Irish-medium schools and a number of voluntary Irish-medium schools. Two are controlled: one is in Belfast and the other is in Dungiven.

At the time of the most recent Department of Education school census, there were 27 controlled integrated schools. As you will be aware, there have been a number of transformations over the past number of months. I believe that there are now 30 controlled integrated schools. Again, I can get the exact number, and a list of them.

As I said very early on, we value our controlled integrated and controlled Irish-medium schools as much as we do all controlled schools. They are controlled schools and have an ethos that is open to all. We support them. I will not go into this in any length, but, as you know, the controlled sector has had a historical deficit of support. It is the role of our sectoral body to support controlled schools and challenge the Education Authority, as the managing and employment authority for controlled schools, on its delivery.

I am happy to provide more detail. I did not come with a complete list of all the schools, as you would not have expected me to do so. At the moment, the numbers are 30 and two.

Mr Butler: Thank you. I will look a bit more into that. Thank you very much, guys.

Ms Brogan: Mark and Jayne, thanks for your presentation. Following on from this morning's presentation and the evidence that we received yesterday and in previous weeks, one of my main

concerns is still about the use of the word "promote" and how the integrated education sector may be elevated above others, specifically the Irish-medium sector. I mentioned that again yesterday. I therefore completely understand your concerns, and, indeed, I have my own.

In saying that, however, as was demonstrated this morning, I know that there is a demand for integrated education throughout the North. If we do not use the word "promote", how do we otherwise meet that demand?

Mr Baker: Thank you, Nicola. We share the concern about the word "promote" whilst respecting the demand.

I have a simple answer, which I do not think is going to be particularly helpful to you. It is on two levels. The first is that it is a matter for the independent review. These are complex processes, and it is really important that the independent review look at how that is met and how it moves forward. That is number one.

The other point to make is that the way in which we move this forward is by all the sectors working together, not by one sector working in any form of isolation. That is not said in any negative way, but you want all sectors to work together to promote integrated education, by which I mean promoting our children and young people being educated together. That is what you want to happen. You do not want it to sit in a separate place. All schools need to consider how they are open to all and how they are moving forward.

The problem that we have with the Bill is that it further sectoralises integrated education by promoting a sector. Surely educating together should be happening across all schools. It is not about the integrated sector but about all our sectors coming together.

There are therefore two simple answers. First, let us ask the independent review to do its job. Secondly, let us get all our sectors working closely together. Remember that NICIE has had a strategic aim to promote, support and grow integrated education since 1987, so the word "promote" has been in there. How the Department can promote — in other words, create demand and meet it, predicting into the future — I do not know. I do not know how, practically, that works on the ground. That is why the independent review is surely the way forward.

Ms Brogan: As I outlined, I share the concerns about creating the demand and about the use of the word "promote" to elevate the integrated sector above other sectors. The demand also is there, so I think that we need to find a way in which to meet that.

Your mention of the independent review leads me on to my next question. I have raised that issue a few times with different stakeholders. Some say that we should wait until the independent review reports, because the Bill would pre-empt its findings, while others say that the review could take too long, that we could be waiting a number of years for its findings and that it would then take another few years for its recommendations to be implemented. What do you think about that?

Mr Baker: The time frames for and the outworkings of the independent review are a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly. The time frames are, I suggest, in the gift and influence of legislators. The outworkings will be around the legislation, potentially, and the policy that comes out of the review.

If something is to take a significant period, yes, we need to address parental preference as it exists today. It is a preference, and we need to look at how we meet the need. I go back to saying that the way is not to create legislation that potentially separates and causes more complexity. The way is to get sectors to work effectively together on how we address our children and young people being educated together. We have forums and ways of doing it.

I tried to say at the end of my short introduction that we have been heartened by the CCMS and a number of other bodies clearly stating that they are around the table in wanting our children and young people to be educated together. Let us take that at face value. Take at face value what we are saying about the controlled schools. Let us drive that forward. Let us look at what that looks like and meet that demand in the ways in which we can, through shared education and through the area-planning process, supportively using what we have at the moment and letting the independent review take place. I am sure that you, as legislators, will challenge the Minister of the day on where that goes.

Ms Brogan: Thanks for that, Mark. I am sure that you can understand the concerns of those who are pushing for integrated education about a delay in the independent review's reporting. I can understand them as well. Thanks so much to both of you.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Mark, I mentioned in the Second Stage debate Martin Luther King's reference to being asked:

"to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism"

during the time of the civil rights movement. I have a real feeling that pupils and parents who wish to access integrated education are being asked to do the same in Northern Ireland at this time. We can take that on during the rest of the Bill's legislative stages, however.

I have one clarifying question. If I have understood Robbie's question correctly, he seemed to be asking you to comment on the mixed nature of pupils in controlled non-integrated schools compared with that in controlled integrated schools. I presume that, on the whole, there is more of a mixed pupil profile in controlled integrated schools than there is in controlled non-integrated schools.

Mr Baker: I will give you the figures that I have here, Chris. These form part of the DE school census, and we can make sure that we provide wider figures for you. If you are talking about the whole controlled sector, 60·8% are Protestant, 10·3% are Catholic and 28·85% are other. If you remove controlled integrated schools from that, the number of Protestants goes up to 61·8%, the number of Catholics goes down to 9·6% and the number of others goes down slightly, to 28·5%. Those percentages clearly show that controlled integrated schools, because of the support that they get to promote their diversity, do have a more diverse nature when it comes to the breakdown of number of pupils in the schools than the body of schools.

There are controlled schools that are every kind of mix. We have controlled schools that are 99% Catholic, but you said it yourself, Chris: it is not a numbers game.

I will say one thing. I am not sitting here calling for gradualism in any way whatsoever. I am sitting here to promote our children and young people being educated together. I personally could do nothing else, and I am not here personally, but neither could the CSSC. We have a firm commitment to our children and young people being educated together. We do not want to be treated as the problem, Chris. We want to be treated as part of the solution.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That is a good note on which to finish, Mark. Thanks very much indeed, Mark and Jayne, for your presentation and for the time that you have taken to be with us. We will stay in touch, I am sure.