



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Integrated Education Bill: Kellie Armstrong  
MLA

17 November 2021

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Education

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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 Harry Harvey  
Mr Daniel McCrossan  
Mr Justin McNulty  
Mr Robin Newton

**Witnesses:**

Ms Armstrong	MLA - Strangford
Ms Fiona McAteer	Alliance Party

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I warmly welcome the sponsor of the Integrated Education Bill, Kellie Armstrong MLA, and Fiona McAteer, Kellie's research officer. You will have up to 10 minutes to make an opening statement, which will be followed by questions from members. It is good to see you.

**Ms Kellie Armstrong (Northern Ireland Assembly):** Thank you very much, Chair. Given that you have been talking about anti-bullying today, my one kind word to all of you is that I come with goodwill. I hope that I can prove that to you today. We have only 10 minutes, so do you want me to go through the amendments?

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Focusing on the amendments would be the best use of time. That will allow members to ask some questions about them.

**Ms Armstrong:** I have provided a paper to the Committee. At appendix B, I found it easier to highlight the amendments in red in the Bill itself so that you can read it.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Let me come in there very briefly. If I am not wrong, that set of annotated amendments is at page 26 of our Integrated Education Bill folder. You will see the document to which Kellie is referring there.

**Ms Armstrong:** As we said to you before, we had open ears. We listened to the concerns and issues that were raised. As a result, the proposed amendments that we have taken forward are related to the

key issues that you have already brought up with me, whether through meetings with the Committee directly or with individual parties.

The first proposed amendment is to clause 1, "Meaning of 'integrated education'". This helps with the Department's response as well. To be honest, clause 1(1)(a) is exactly the same. In clause 1(2)(b), we have put in specifically and explicitly that this refers to the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. That legislation is not being changed. Any school that wants to legally be determined as an integrated school, whether that is grant maintained or controlled integrated status, has to go through the processes as outlined in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. We have changed that, which should, hopefully, address a lot of concerns that there would be judicial reviews or self-designation.

Before moving on to the next proposed amendment, I want to say that I have not tabled these amendments. I wanted to give the Committee its place and bring the proposed amendments to you. I have spoken to some of you directly about them. We will talk about tabling them afterwards.

The next proposed amendment is to clause 3, "Advisory body". Concerns were raised by the Department and the Committee that we would be asking that advisory body, perhaps the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), to be consulted on everything. We have specified there — you can see it in red — that it should be specifically in relation to integrated education. Also in clause 3, you will see that I have struck out "promotion of" and inserted "support for". Again, I have listened to the Committee, because I know that the word "promote" was causing you a lot of concern. I know that the public interest and the independent review of integrated education had mentioned "promote", but, to be honest, we said that we would have open ears. From now on, where the word "promote" is used, it is changed to "support". That takes away the premise that integrated education is somehow treated better or is on a higher plane than any of the other sectors. It is simply "to encourage, facilitate and support". We believe that "support" means "to provide for" or "to enable assistance". That is softer, and I hope that the Committee can accept that change. Moving on in that same vein, you will see in red in the document that, where "promote" has been used in headings in the Bill, I have changed it to "support".

The next proposed amendments are in clause 5. Again, in softening that to meet the Committee's requests, I have changed the word "increase" to "meet" in clause 5(1)(a). It reads:

*"A reference to the support for integrated education is a reference to—*

*(a) identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet the demand for the provision of integrated education"*

as opposed to:

*"increase the demand for ... integrated education".*

Hopefully, that will help the Committee.

If you do not mind, I will come back to clause 7. There is an issue with that clause.

This is the next one after all the instances of "promote" being changed to "support". I think, in fact, that that is basically all the main proposed amendments that we have, so I will go back to clause 7 now. Clause 7 is causing us a bit of concern. Set aside what is in red under clause 7(1) in the document that is in front of you. The changes to clause 7(2) will hopefully help to define what a "new school" is. As we say there, a "new school" is not an amalgamated school, a school that has significantly changed in size or a school that has relocated.

Unfortunately, we still need to work through clause 7(1). I do not have the wording sorted out yet. As you can see from what we have already put in for clause 7, the intention is that after:

*"When planning for the establishment of a new school, education bodies must apply",*

we will put in:

*"options for all management types on an equal basis and an evidence based report that includes a local community conversation".*

The community conversation that we know about is the co-production and co-design piece that was developed by Ulster University, which the Chair said is in your pack. We cannot use the words "community conversation" in the Bill, because that is a toolkit that was provided by Ulster University. We therefore need to find a way to say that, when the Department brings forward the establishment of a new school, all school types will be treated equally and a ground-up survey or consultation will be done so that the community can decide on the type of school for an area. Therefore, if the area wants a maintained school, it can have that; if the area wants a controlled school, then so be it; if the area wants an integrated or Irish-medium school, those options are available. I have had a conversation with the sector about that change. The sector said that it will not have an issue with that, so long as all types of school are treated equally.

I hope that the Committee can see that, through these proposed amendments, we are trying to react to what it has asked us to do. This is about goodwill and trying to make sure that those concerns are dealt with. I do not know whether you have other concerns, Chair, but maybe it would be better if I were to stop now and give the Committee the opportunity to ask questions or raise anything else that it needs to raise for the rest of the session.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That sounds good. Thanks for that, Kellie. I will move swiftly to members. For the avoidance of any doubt, I support the proposed amendments and appreciate the intention of what is being attempted in clause 7, which is to provide:

*"options for all management types on an equal basis and an evidence based report that includes"*

some type of community consultation. I appreciate, however, that there is work to be done on the specific text.

**Ms Armstrong:** I will just let you know, Chair, that some of the concerns around that have come from the Bill Office. That proposed amendment may not be admissible, so it may well be for the Speaker to decide on it. I hope, however, that, if we and the Committee are happy with that type of approach, the Speaker might also be. It may be in the gift of the Speaker to decide whether that is admissible.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK. Members, I will try to keep questions to approximately four minutes.

**Mr Sheehan:** Thanks, Kellie and Fiona. I welcome the proposed amendments that you have brought forward, Kellie. I am not saying that we support them at the minute, because we need legal advice around some of the issues. You raised the issue of community conversation and the part of clause 7 that probably needs to be redrafted. I want to ask about clause 6 and education bodies, which include the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Clause 6 states:

*"Education bodies must include provision for integrated education when—  
developing, adopting ... designing and delivering public services."*

Will you give me an example of the outworkings of that and how it would work, and explain why CCMS, in particular, would have some duty regarding that clause?

**Ms Armstrong:** The general duty in clause 6 is there because the education bodies that are listed in the Bill are the managing authorities. There is no managing authority for integrated education. When you are:

*"developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans; and designing and delivering public services",*

such as school transport, school meals, special education provision, they need to be covered by someone. We are saying that the Department would be in charge of that, but education bodies must make provision for integrated education when they are planning for those types of services.

**Ms Fiona McAteer (Alliance Party):** CCMS is included because it is already defined on the statute books as an education body. We did not single it out; it is included because it is already defined.

**Mr Sheehan:** I am focusing on CCMS. Its responsibility is the management of the schools that come under its authority. Why would it have an input to transport to an integrated school, for example?

**Ms Armstrong:** The EA and CCMS are management authorities, so that is what they do. That is part of their role. The EA has more control over school transport. They are managing authorities.

**Mr Sheehan:** Are you saying, Kellie, that clause 6 does not change anything?

**Ms Armstrong:** When we met with CCMS, Gerry Campbell said, very clearly, that CCMS already has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate, and it does so without it causing a lot of difficulties for CCMS. It works with integrated education through the shared education facilities, or, in the case of A levels, when schools are sharing across sites as part of the — Fiona, what is the terminology?

**Ms McAteer:** The entitlement framework.

**Ms Armstrong:** Therefore, they already have that working relationship. This is more about planning for policies. If a new policy comes out on transport or special educational needs (SEN) provision, for instance, that is brought in as a general duty. It is not to replace what CCMS does for its maintained schools, or EA does for its controlled schools, although EA is in charge of a significant number of controlled integrated schools. If the Committee feels that the Bill needs to be updated or tightened to explain that, we can look at it, or the Committee can look at that.

**Mr Sheehan:** That is all I have, Kellie. Thanks.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Robin, you have four minutes, please.

**Mr Newton:** Kellie, I want to tease out the Deputy Chair's question. Will you define the education bodies?

**Ms Armstrong:** They are defined at clause 13, and they are defined in legislation.

**Ms McAteer:** Clause 13 defines education bodies as:

*"(i) the Department of Education;*

*(ii) the Education Authority;*

*(iii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;*

*(iv) the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and*

*(v) the Youth Council for Northern Ireland".*

They are already defined in statute outside of this legislation.

**Ms Armstrong:** The drafter advised that they are the bodies that are in statute, so we had to include them.

**Mr Newton:** I have a quick question about clause 5(1)(a), which refers to:

*"identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet the demand".*

How would demand be assessed?

**Ms Armstrong:** We have not done that in the Bill, Robin, because it would be up to the professionals in the Department to define it. We have said that a reference to "support" — we have changed the word to "support" — "for integrated education" is a reference to:

*"identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet demand".*

"Identifying, assessing [and] monitoring" will be defined by the Department. We have deliberately ensured that, in the Bill, we do not pre-empt what the Department already does. If, as part of area planning, the Department is considering whether there is demand, how it assesses that is a matter for the Department.

**Ms McAteer:** Robin, NICIE already does that. It has a mechanism, so the Department could ask NICIE to help with that role. It already looks at demand.

**Mr Newton:** OK. Two things. You know that I support integrated education and that my children were educated at an integrated school for second-level education. That school was Methody. Methody met my demand for education, and, across Northern Ireland, schools in the sectors are meeting the demand from parents for integrated education. At the other end of the scale, when surveys are done, very high percentages of people are quoted as saying, "I want my children to attend an integrated education establishment". Which figures will be used? Will demand be assessed based on the fact that it is being met by a local school, whether in Belfast, Ballymena or Banbridge, or as per various surveys around Northern Ireland?

**Ms Armstrong:** It would be very unfair to say to the integrated education movement that the demand is being met by existing schools. For instance, in my area, up to 200 children per annum cannot access integrated education because there are not enough places for them. I would look to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the good relations strategy, because the Executive Office uses NISRA figures. It has confirmed that no one has complained directly about the figures.

One in five children who puts down an integrated school as first preference does not get into that school. Some of that information can be used, but we have to remember that, in East Belfast, for example, there is not an integrated option. It is up to the Department to identify demand. We are giving the Department the opportunity to identify the source that it will use to assess and monitor with the aim of meeting demand.

**Mr Newton:** You know, of course, that East Belfast is extremely well served by Lagan College, which is a very good integrated school.

**Ms Armstrong:** Lagan College is not in East Belfast.

**Mr Newton:** It is located in South Belfast, but it serves East Belfast in much the same way as Breda does.

**Ms Armstrong:** Lagan College also serves my constituency, Robin, of Strangford. *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]*

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That is four minutes. Do you want to make a final point, Robin?

**Mr Newton:** I am finished, Chair. I thank Kellie.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Regardless of the constituency that Lagan College is in, it is the most oversubscribed school in Northern Ireland. OK. Moving on. Daniel McCrossan MLA, if connectivity allows you.

**Mr McCrossan:** Yes, Chair. Can you hear me OK?

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** We can indeed. Thanks.

**Mr McCrossan:** Kellie, thank you very much for being here. I will go straight to it. The word "promote" has caused great disquiet in many quarters, as you know. It must be emphasised that it is not the actual word but its meaning that is the problem. Words cannot be divorced from their meaning. You have suggested a substitute word: "support". What difference in meaning does that word bring to clauses 4 and 5 specifically and to the Bill generally? Will you define what it means in the context of the Bill, please?

**Ms Armstrong:** Daniel, I will try my best. I am not a drafter or a legal person, so please forgive me. "Promote" is, I feel, a much more forceful word. As the Committee rightly said to me previously, "promote" presumed more about integrated education and took it to the fore, whereas "support" does not mean — how would you say it? — placing something on a pedestal. Support is more in line with encouragement and facilitation. I believe that the definition of "support" is "to provide for" or "to enable assistance", whereas a lot of people have seen "promote" as meaning leaflets, TV adverts and all of that.

**Ms McAteer:** "Promote" would mean that the Department and the Education Authority would always have to talk about integrated education, whereas "support" is a more nurturing word that fits well with "encourage" and "facilitate", which the Bill already uses.

**Mr McCrossan:** OK. Further to that, how, in particular, do you see the Department and other named bodies' roles changed by the application of "support" instead of "promote"?

**Ms Armstrong:** To be honest, I think that a lot of the other bodies would breathe a sigh of relief, Daniel, because we are bringing in something a lot softer. We talked to the integrated education movement about it, because changing from "promote", which has come through the independent review of integrated education, surveys that we have done and many reports over the years, puts us in an awkward position. People in the movement said, however, that it would be wonderful even to get "support". They recognise that "support" is not the same as "promote"; it is a much softer word and does not place as much responsibility on those other bodies. The Bill asks for support as opposed to promotion, so it moves away from driving something forward to providing assistance for it.

**Mr McCrossan:** OK. It is still not entirely clear, Kellie. You said in your first answer that "support" means "to provide for". That is still not clear. What does that mean?

**Ms McAteer:** It fits in well with the requirement for a strategy and an action plan. The Department has to provide a strategy and an action plan, which it has failed to do for many years. It is to help to support integrated education. The Department has to encourage and facilitate, but many people in the movement and teachers will say that it has not been proactively discharging that duty.

**Mr McCrossan:** OK. Thank you. I will make a further point. The Department was concerned that the word "promote" would lead to ignoring the cost to the public purse of meeting demand. It also ignores the ability of an integrated school to deliver effective and efficient education or take account of the school's physical capacity in meeting that demand. How does using the word "support" evade those problems?

**Ms Armstrong:** Sorry, give us that question again, Daniel.

**Ms McAteer:** Is it about the cost to the public purse, Daniel?

**Mr McCrossan:** The Department was concerned that the word "promote" would lead to ignoring the cost to the public purse of meeting demand. It also ignores the ability of an integrated school to deliver effective and efficient education or take account of the school's physical capacity in meeting such demand. How does using the word "support" evade those problems?

**Ms Armstrong:** Sorry, Daniel, I get that now. At the moment, integrated schools put forward development proposals. That is how they increase the size of the school and the number of pupils that it has. It is up to the Department to decide whether a proposal goes forward. We are putting into the Department's statutory duty the requirement to identify, assess and monitor. We do not want all schools to turn round and say, "We need to accommodate another 50 pupils". It is still about going through development proposals. We are not changing it; it is exactly the same process. The Department already does that, but we are asking it to take forward a duty to identify, assess and monitor. Later, we say that it can report on where demand is not increasing and where there is a decrease, because we might not find that there is a demand. Not everybody wants integrated education, as we have heard through the Committee. It is not always about increasing; it is also about recognising where that is not appropriate.

**Ms McAteer:** It is about assessing. We need to assess whether, in fact, an area does not need an increase.

**Mr McCrossan:** On that basis —

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** This is your last question, Daniel. Thanks.

**Mr McCrossan:** Yes. Thank you, Chair.

Is it not possible that the word "support" is also liable to lead to judicial review (JR) in order to clarify its meaning? Everyone with whom I have had a conversation about that said that there is a concern that that will lead to judicial review because of the confusion around what is intended.

**Ms McAteer:** We do not necessarily agree with that point. I do not think that it would. It is up to the Department. You could argue that for anything, really.

**Ms Armstrong:** Daniel, there has been a lot of talk about judicial reviews. We have dealt with the Department's discussion on judicial reviews by specifically and explicitly changing the meaning of "integrated education" to define an integrated school as having to meet the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, under which the Department is already supposed to "encourage and facilitate" integrated education. "Support" adds to that.

**Ms McAteer:** The Department has already had multiple JRs taken against it, anyway. We are meeting the Department soon, so we can discuss that further with it.

**Ms Armstrong:** Recently, an integrated school had to threaten to take forward a JR because the Department was not supporting it.

**Mr Butler:** I met the Bill sponsor last night and had a conversation with her, so I am content at this stage. Given the closed session that we have just had, I will read through some stuff, and I will not waste your time, guys. Thank you so much for your time last night.

**Ms McAteer:** If you have any other questions, you know where we are, so please contact us.

**Mr Butler:** Thank you.

**Mrs Dodds:** Thank you to those providing the answers. I know that it is not an easy task.

In clause 7, you indicate — I will paraphrase — that there will be support to meet the demand for integrated education. Does the Department have a duty to meet the demand for any other sector?

**Ms McAteer:** Sorry, Diane, is that clause 5?

**Mrs Dodds:** Whichever clause it is. Sorry. That is right: clauses 4 and 5.

**Ms Armstrong:** Integrated education does not have a managing authority. The managing authorities for controlled and maintained schools look at identifying, assessing and monitoring with the aim of meeting demand. You will find —

**Mrs Dodds:** No, that is not the question. The Bill would place into law the idea that you would have to meet the demand for integrated education. There is a conversation —

**Ms McAteer:** It refers to "aiming" to meet demand.

**Mrs Dodds:** Let us take it as aiming to meet the demand. OK. Does the Department have a statutory duty to aim to meet the demand for Catholic maintained education, Irish-medium education or controlled sector and grammar-school education? Does the Department have a duty in law that asks it to "aim" to meet the demand for any of the other sectors?

**Ms Armstrong:** Being on the Education Committee, you will know better than I do that the Department has a responsibility to provide children with education. At the moment, we have a sectoral system where there is parental preference, and, because parents can choose the type of school that they want their child to go to, we find that parents and pupils have different choices. Development



proposals are brought through by schools when there is an increased demand, and the Department says yes or no on that basis. That is for all sectors, as far as I am aware.

**Ms Dodds:** I am just throwing questions out, Kellie. I understand that. I am not sure that that answers the question. One of the charges against the Bill is that it places the integrated sector on a different footing from other sectors. I do not know the answer. All that I am trying to find out from you is whether "aiming" to meet the demand for integrated education — presumably, there would be a JR if somebody judged that the Department was not aiming to do so — happens for every other sector. I do not know, but I will go away and ask that question.

**Ms McAteer:** The other sectors have their own planning authority for area planning. No one plans for integrated education.

**Ms Armstrong:** It goes outside education as well, Diane. You have to remember that integrated education is talked about in the 1998 Belfast Agreement, and it is part of the good relations strategy through the Executive Office. Within that, there is other legislation —

**Ms Dodds:** To be honest, I am aware of all those things. All I am interested in is how the Bill changes statute. That is what I am trying to get to.

**Ms Armstrong:** The simplest way that I can say it is this: under statute, other sectors have managing authorities, but integrated education does not. The Bill attempts to bring integrated education into that planning, so, with my change, it is:

*" identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet the demand for the provision of integrated education".*

**Ms McAteer:** We are just trying to make it a level playing field.

**Ms Armstrong:** Yes, level playing field.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That is four minutes, Diane. Do you want to ask a final question?

**Ms Dodds:** No, it is OK. I intend to talk to Kellie.

**Ms Brogan:** Hello, Kellie and Fiona. First, I welcome the amendments so far. You have definitely listened to everything that the Committee and stakeholders have been saying about the Bill throughout the evidence sessions. That is positive.

As you know, we await legal advice on the amendments, so we will not really be able to comment until we receive that. My only question is about clause 7. You may not be in a position to answer it, Kellie; it may be a question for the Bill Clerks. Why might clause 7 not be admissible? Will you explain what the consequences of that would be?

**Ms Armstrong:** We have been through Second Stage, and clause 7, as it was and without amendments, went through. Given that the amendment changes clause 7 quite significantly, the Speaker might say, "Hold on a minute. We are starting to talk about other sectors. Is that admissible as part of the Integrated Education Bill?".

**Ms McAteer:** Clause 7 is about the presumption that all new schools will be integrated. If we change it to "all management types", they may feel that that is outside the scope of the Bill or inadmissible. That is the advice, in a nutshell. I paraphrased it entirely.

**Ms Armstrong:** We have listened, and we would love it to go through. As I said, the wording in red on your page is not correct. I hope that clause 7(2), which is the part about new schools, is right. It is about how, taking a ground-up approach, to build into legislation all the management types, using co-production and co-design in a way that can work, that will be acceptable and that is within the scope of the Bill. We are trying our best on that. To be honest, I hope that, if we can get a form of wording — I do not have it for you today — with which the Committee and I are happy, the Speaker may be swayed — you never know. At this stage, we need that legal wording.

**Ms McAteer:** We welcome any thoughts or advice, Nicola.

**Ms Brogan:** Thanks, Fiona. That is fair enough. I understand that it is because clause 7 goes outside the scope of integrated education.

Finally, when do you think that you will table the amendments?

**Ms Armstrong:** I will be honest with you, Nicola. I was speaking to the Bill Clerk, who was pushing me quite hard to table the amendments. I wanted to wait until after I had spoken to you guys today. We cannot put an amendment to clause 7 forward because the wording is not there yet. If the Committee is not against the other amendments, we could table those. I did not want to jump the gun by tabling amendments without giving the Committee its place.

**Ms McAteer:** If the Committee wants to take the amendments forward, we are not precious about that; you can have them.

**Ms Brogan:** Thanks very much to both of you. I am sure that we will speak to you in the near future.

**Mr McNulty:** Thanks, Kellie and Fiona. It was good to see you last night, Kellie, at the event, which I co-sponsored, to mark the 103rd anniversary of Polish independence. It was a lovely event at Stormont, and it was great to welcome our Polish friends.

What do clause 1(1)(b) and clause 1(1)(c) do?

**Ms Armstrong:** Their purpose is to tidy up, Justin. Clause 1(1)(c) defines integrated schools as including "those of different abilities." Integrated schools tend to be all-ability schools, which means that they have young people who may be vocational, those who may be academic and those who may have special educational needs. Integrated schools have that blend of children, and that is where the wording "different abilities" comes from. Clause 1(1)(b) defines them as including:

*"those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not".*

That is to take account of the fact that there is a mix of young people, and it adds to the original meaning of integrated education, because that was not there previously. That is now, very clearly, what integrated education is. It is a mix not just of religious beliefs but of socio-economic backgrounds and abilities, and we are putting that into the Bill so that we recognise that that is part of that integration and coming together.

**Mr McNulty:** OK. So, clause 1(1)(c) does not call out special educational needs, but that is what it aims to do.

**Ms Armstrong:** No, it is not just about special educational needs. When the Bill talks about "different abilities", that includes the whole range of young people: vocational, academic and those with special educational needs. Originally, integrated education, as you know, focused on Protestants and Catholics, but, with such a diverse Northern Ireland, it is so much more now. That is why we wanted to add that to the meaning of integrated education. It recognises and is about all backgrounds.

**Mr McNulty:** Would "all abilities" be better than "different abilities"?

**Ms Armstrong:** It is not that it is not, but, for instance, there may be an integrated school that does not have a special education unit or one that does not provide A levels, so "different abilities" covers that.

**Ms McAteer:** Hopefully, it covers the wide spectrum.

**Mr McNulty:** Do all schools not serve different socio-economic backgrounds?

**Ms Armstrong:** They do, but the definition in law of integrated education focused on a school having a reasonable number of Protestants and Catholics. It is more than that now. We want to be able to recognise the fact that integrated schools have pupils of different abilities and different socio-economic backgrounds.

**Ms McAteer:** Grammar schools might not experience socio-economic deprivation.

**Mr McNulty:** Excuse me?

**Ms McAteer:** Grammar schools are slightly different because not every one will have pupils experiencing socio-economic deprivation.

**Mr McNulty:** I would have thought that all schools have some pupils from all backgrounds

**Ms McAteer:** Some pupils, but not a very big mix.

**Ms Armstrong:** The measurement of free school meals provides the main clarification of that. We tend to find that different types of school have a different mix. All that we are trying to do is to make sure that the meaning of integrated education covers that diversity. The Bill means that the Education and Training Inspectorate could go into integrated schools and ask them, "In what way do you have different abilities? How can you prove that your children, teachers and board of governors are a mix of those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not?". That would also apply to a school's mix of cultures, religions and so on.

**Mr McNulty:** The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is a named body in the Bill. What is the rationale for that?

**Ms McAteer:** CCEA is one of the statutory education bodies that we were told we had to include. It already does a wide range of stuff for integrated schools. It already provides a wide range of modules and syllables for all different types of topics.

**Mr McNulty:** What impact will CCEA's including provision for integrated education have on such matters as curriculum support documentation, examination specifications and regulatory functions?

**Ms Armstrong:** Not very much, because it already does that. Integrated schools do not do different exams from everyone else. It just means that, for instance, when an integrated school is looking at a subject — for instance, GCSE English or history — it will use a mix of different sources for its course to make sure that it reflects the pupils and the mix of diversity in Northern Ireland. That is all it is. Schools already do this now, and they do it really well.

Sorry, my light has just gone out.

**Mr McNulty:** Your light has gone out, Kellie, but I know that you are not trying to keep us in the dark.

**Ms Armstrong:** The lights have gone.

**Mr McNulty:** May I keep going?

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Final question, Justin, please.

**Mr McNulty:** Clauses 8 and 9 relate to the production of and reporting on an integrated education strategy. The EA informed us that the concept of the strategy being solely for the integrated sector would pose a risk to area planning by placing one sector above others. What is your view on that possibility?

**Ms Armstrong:** I do not think that it does. Actually, it balances things out a little. Why would there not be an integrated education strategy?

**Ms McAteer:** It fits in well with the EA's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate. Facilitate, to me, includes facilitating a strategy, an action plan and a way forward.

**Ms Armstrong:** Clause 8(2)(e) states that an action plan, as part of the strategy, must:

*"(i) be prepared in consultation with persons with knowledge and experience of integrated schools including teachers, governors, pupils, families, and sectoral and community bodies;*

- (ii) include targets ... ; and
- (iii) include measurable benchmarks".

Those are not unusual actions for a strategy or action plan. For instance, I would expect the business plan for the EA or CCMS to have similar things. We just do not have that at the moment for integrated education.

**Mr McNulty:** Do you see there being an issue in relation to the collaboration arrangements between sectors as a consequence of this strategy for the integrated sector? Is every two years not a short timescale for reporting?

**Ms McAteer:** We went with an average time.

**Ms Armstrong:** Shared education already provides a report every two years, so that is not unusual for the Department. As for collaborative working, schools already do that. There is not a problem with that. All that we are doing is putting it into statute.

**Mr McNulty:** OK. Thanks very much, Fiona and Kellie.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I note the mention of targets. I always find it interesting that the Executive's tackling paramilitarism action plan, published in 2016, commits the Executive to set ambitious targets:

*"to measurably reduce segregation in education".*

I imagine that much of this is consistent with what the Executive committed themselves to doing in that regard.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK, thanks. All members have spoken. Oh, sorry, Harry. Apologies.

**Mrs Dodds:** My Strangford co-representative.

**Mr Harvey:** That is no bother. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Kellie and Fiona. I hope that you are doing well.

Clause 10(3) states:

*"Regulations under this section may include provision amending other Northern Ireland legislation."*

Is that not very wide? It makes it look as though you could do anything at any stage. Why is that in the Bill?

**Ms McAteer:** We were told that it is a drafting style from Westminster. We do not have our own drafters here, so that is the terminology or turn of phrase used by the drafters whom we use from the expert drafting panel.

**Mr Harvey:** OK. Probably, it is just so that at, any stage, you can amend anything that would be suitable for what you are doing, yes?

**Ms Armstrong:** It would be in relation to integrated education and the Department of Education.

**Mr Harvey:** OK. Thank you very much.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Kellie and Fiona, thanks very much indeed for taking the time to present those amendments and for taking questions.

**Ms Armstrong:** I appreciate that the Committee will review the amendments. As a gesture of conciliatory goodwill, I wonder does the Committee want me to take the amendments forward, although clause 7 is not ready yet, or would the Committee prefer to do that? Now that we have talked about them, I can give that over to the Committee. It is a case of what you want me to do.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** We are scheduled to have an informal consideration in closed session now. We can try to give you an indication of a response to that question as soon as we can. I cannot speak on behalf of the Committee, but I suspect that the consensus will be for you to table the amendments. I will check that with the Committee and give you a response as soon as I can.

**Ms Armstrong:** I do not want to waste your time by submitting the amendments, and the Committee then does the same. By the deadline, we might have tabled the same amendments, which would not be good, and they would probably be mutually exclusive.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** We will indicate as soon as possible whether the Committee has any intention to table amendments.

**Ms Armstrong:** The third time is a charm. Thank you very much, Chair. This was my third time in front of the Committee. After all those questions, I think that I need to lie down.

**The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** It was good to see you.