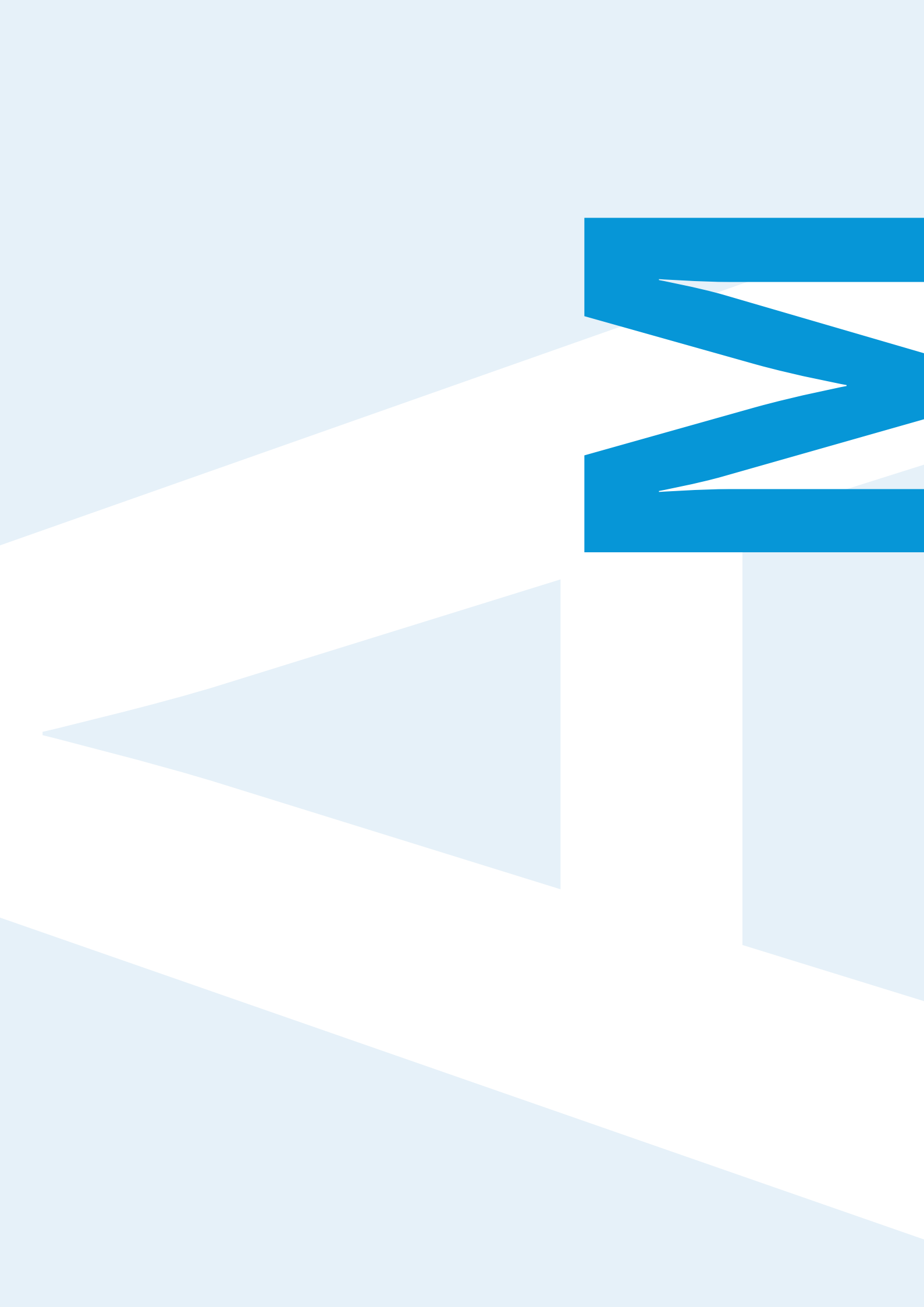


Integration Works for Everybody

Forestview +44 (0)28 9069 4099
Purdy's Lane info@ief.org.uk
Belfast www.ief.org.uk
BT8 7AR

Alternative Manifesto







Our Vision

We share the vision, held by the overwhelming majority of citizens, of a united community and a shared future. We acknowledge that policies such as Together: Building a United Community and the Programme for Government (at the time of writing, still in draft form), as well as the draft Children and Young People's Strategy, express an aspiration by political leaders to develop widespread well-being and economic prosperity, in a diverse and safe society, where people are proud of their traditions and respect those of others.

We see a reformed education system as an essential ingredient of this future. An education system which brings children, staff and governors from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths or none, and of other cultures, together in one school. A system which recognises and respects diversity and ensures that young people, including newcomer pupils, those with additional needs and LGBTQ pupils, feel confident and welcome in the school environment. This would be a system which fully prepares young people to contribute positively to a modern democracy and be successful citizens in an increasingly complex global society.

The draft Programme for Government commits any future Executive and its departments to working towards an equal and shared society and towards giving people the best start in life.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (2015) and the draft Children and Young People's Strategy require that, if we are to improve the well-being of children and young people, they should '... live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share that characteristic.'

However, the role of education in realising these aspirations is not adequately explored or promoted in current government policy documents.

This policy gap should be addressed as part of a concerted strategy to transform a post-conflict society into a flourishing, diverse but united community.

To achieve our common vision, we need meaningful reform of the way education is planned, managed and delivered. We have seen too many projects, tweaks and minor adjustments which do not impact on the core character of an archaic, segregated system of schools.

We need to change our system of education.

The Context

Northern Ireland maintains an education system that serves to separate our children. Around 90% of pupils in Northern Ireland are educated in schools that identify with a single tradition or denomination. Consequently, pupil interactions are mostly with peers, teachers and others from their own community, with limited opportunity to explore and engage with other beliefs and attitudes.

Reform of public administration has failed to rationalise education provision, with multiple facets and layers of management and governance underpinning a divided system and sustaining a culture of competition between schools.

Meanwhile these schools are facing unprecedented financial strain.

We provide initial teacher training through four institutions, each with separate forms of governance and, again, largely segregated according to religious or traditional background.

We have a system which is both costly and divisive.



In the face of this, there is widespread support and advocacy within and beyond Northern Ireland for an approach which educates children of all backgrounds and traditions together:

- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged an end to the segregated nature of Northern Ireland's education system.¹
- The Panel on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups, established by the NI Executive under the Fresh Start Agreement, recommended that the Executive "measurably reduce segregation in education and housing and set ambitious targets and milestones..."²
- Business leaders and economists question and criticise the costly duplication in the system, and the consequent over-supply of places. The findings from the Northern Ireland Business Leaders' Survey³ indicated majority support for a de-segregated education system, to help to strengthen cross-community relationships and to enable funds to be directed towards developing skills.
- And parents and young people want change. A Northern Ireland-wide poll showed that 67% of parents would support a proposal for their school to become officially integrated.⁴

Integrated schools provide a model for a system which ensures that children from diverse backgrounds are educated together every day, side by side in the same classrooms. They demonstrate that pupils can flourish in an environment which actively welcomes pupils of all faiths and beliefs, and where this diversity is reflected in staffing and in the board of governors.

We are confident that most parents would like access to a good school in which the ethos is planned and developed to promote inclusiveness and mutual respect; this does not mean simply pretending that everyone is the same but rather acknowledging, exploring and celebrating diversity within the classroom.

Yet few families currently have this opportunity when, at the time of publication, only 65 schools are integrated. All schools in receipt of public funding, of whatever management type, should be inclusive spaces, their policies and practice reflecting the diverse range of religious and cultural backgrounds represented across Northern Ireland schools. Northern Ireland continues to plan education delivery through a process which lacks meaningful community input and which fails to reflect parental choice, community need, the desire for a shared future or fiscal realities.

We cannot continue to squander public money on a system which works to sustain division whilst failing to deliver good educational outcomes for a sizeable proportion of the population and which faces a serious financial crisis.

¹ Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland June 2016*

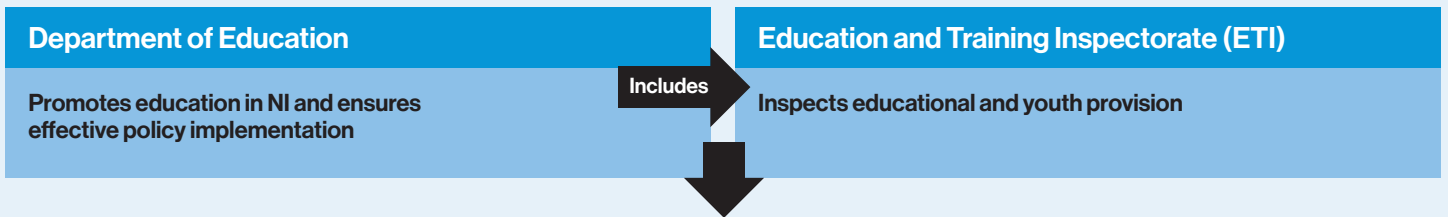
² The Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland May 2016 (Lord Alderdice, John McBurney, Prof Monica McWilliams)

³ Business Leaders' Panel Survey LucidTalk 2013

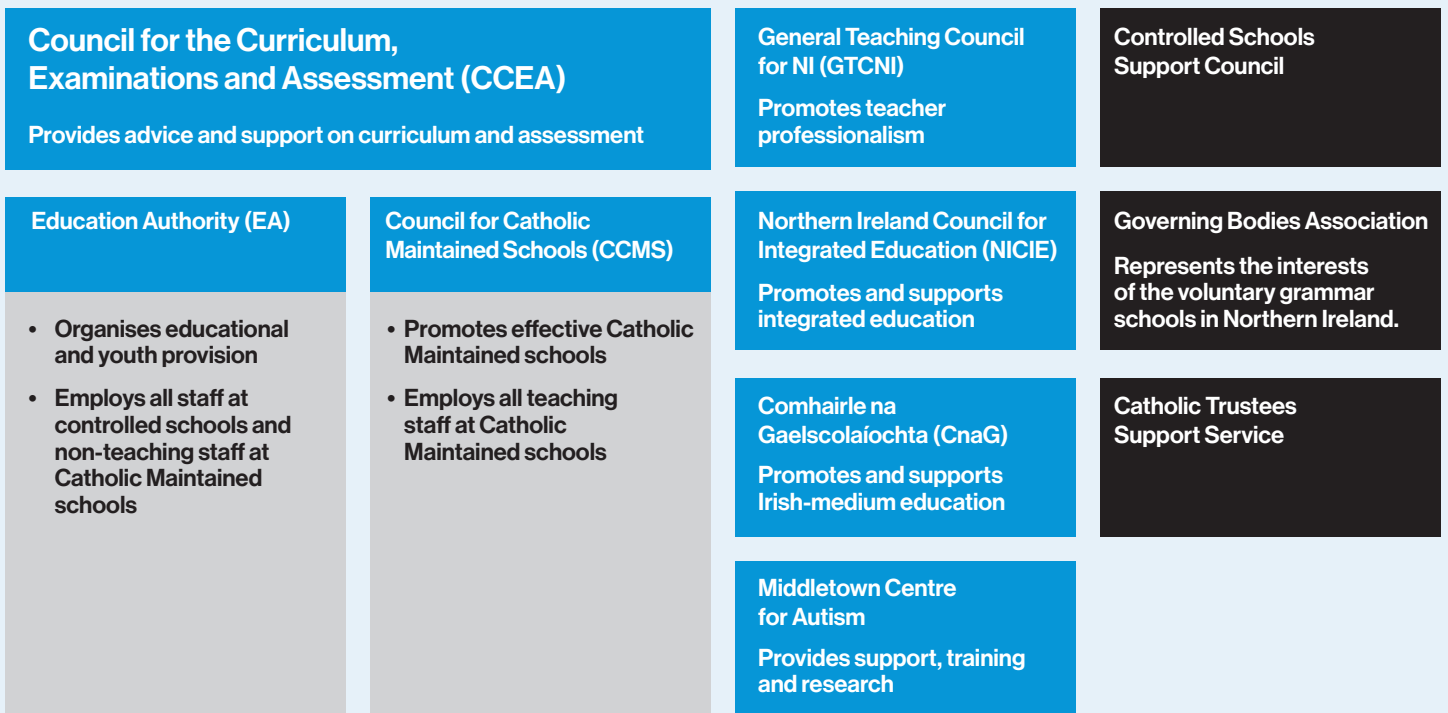
⁴ LucidTalk 2018

Education Administration in NI: an Overview

- There are 1153 primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland
- There are 173,744 pupils in primary schools
- There are 140,545 pupils in post-primary schools



Department of Education-funded bodies



Steps to a New System

To answer the widespread desire for integrated education, and to support social progress, we need to see a government strategy with ambitious targets to grow the numbers of pupils in integrated schools across Northern Ireland. This strategy needs to be reflected in education planning and in a commitment to reform the structure of NI education.

Planning for Northern Ireland's education and the schools estate must reflect community needs and the common aspiration for a peaceful, diverse and united community. An NI Executive should demonstrate strong leadership and establish a single, streamlined, authority for education planning and administration.

Student teachers require support and preparation for teaching in a diverse classroom. We believe that teachers of all faiths and none should be trained together on the same courses at the same locations, with initial training and continuing professional development help them flourish in an education system designed to reflect the world in which young people will grow up.

When it comes to management of schools, the makeup of a board of governors varies, depending on the school's management type. This means that there are now 11 different formats of board of governors across schools in Northern Ireland. In addition, there is often a lack of diversity within school boards, and a paucity of board members who bring particular skills and insights to the work.

...establish a single, streamlined, authority for education planning and administration...

We believe that teachers of all faiths and none should be trained together on the same courses at the same locations...



A single model of governance, which is reflective of wider society, should be developed by the Department of Education. Parental and young voices need to be included. Furthermore, we recommend that the recruitment and selection of governors should be reviewed to include, for example, drawing on professional bodies and community groups to meet skills requirements. This would help achieve the Department's aim for schools to forge stronger links with the world of business and industry and to build relationships within their local community.

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone in recruitment, employment or promotion on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion. However, teachers and schools are exempt from this provision. This is a key aspect of institutional separation in education, enabling schools when recruiting teachers to give preference to candidates whose religious belief aligns with that of the school. An NI Executive should repeal the exception for teachers in the 1998 Order, to ensure equal opportunity and to help schools build a team of staff which reflects Northern Ireland's religious and ethnic diversity.

Department for Communities and the Department of Education should establish an interdepartmental strategic approach to mixed housing and integrated education.

Under **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**, it is a legal requirement for public authorities "to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally; between people with a disability and people without; and between people with dependants and people without."

However, Section 75 does not apply directly to schools. The NI Executive should extend Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to apply to all schools, affording pupils and staff the same protection and rights as individuals in other settings.

The Department should enhance the curriculum to include the development of skills, structures and relationships that enable pupils and parents, staff and governors and the wider community to increase their understanding, acceptance and respect for political, cultural and religious difference. The Department should also develop age-appropriate primary and post-primary anti-sectarian resources and ensure that teachers are trained, equipped and supported to deliver these effectively in the classroom.

Nearly all schools in NI are open in enrolment to pupils of all backgrounds, but there needs to be a specific requirement for all schools to develop an actively welcoming and inclusive environment. **We call for inclusivity and equality to be inspection issues**, with key indicators to show that political, cultural and religious differences are recognised, respected and acknowledged through a school's daily routine and curriculum.

If the Northern Ireland Government and the wider population are to move towards a shared future, integration should inform all future models of social infrastructure. Reflecting the commitment to collaborative working in the Programme for Government, the **Department for Communities and the Department of Education should establish an interdepartmental strategic approach to mixed housing and integrated education.**

The 2016 Independent Review of Integrated Education, commissioned by the Minister of Education, recommends a series of steps to support the growth and development of integrated education, and adopting these steps would go some way to progressing the IEF vision of a future education system.

When parents can be confident that their local school, wherever they live in Northern Ireland, will meet their children's needs; when they can be certain that it will nurture their individuality and respect their culture and traditions - then every school will be a good school, as sought by the Department of Education. This would remove the need for separate sectoral support bodies and would facilitate an efficient planning process for education, leading to a cohesive education system reflecting the diversity of life here and contributing massively to the development of a united community.



Key Outcomes

To contribute to a more united community and to ensure the most efficient use of the resources available in education the Government must commit to developing integrated education through a growth strategy, major structural change and other specific measures.

Growth Strategy

- The Government should set a target to increase the percentage of pupils in integrated schools to 10% by 2021, and plan to meet it
- The Government plan should include strategic use of the £500m Stormont House Agreement Funding
- The Education Authority should make integrated education the priority focus of the current area planning process. Planning teams should work with communities and challenge vested interests to ensure such a focus.
- There should be a presumption that any new schools to be established should be integrated, subject to community consultation

Structural Change

- There should be a single authority for the administration and planning of education in Northern Ireland.
- The DE should develop and introduce a single model of governance for all schools in Northern Ireland, representative of the wider community and of a range of skills and perspectives
- The Government should end the duplication and segregation of initial teacher training and establish a single teacher training college open to students of all religions and none

Other Specific Measures

- The 'Section 75' non-discrimination provisions of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) should be extended to cover all schools
- Fair employment legislation should be extended to cover the recruitment of teachers
- Equality and inclusivity should become issues considered in the process of inspection of schools
- Integrated education should be a significant consideration in the planning of new housing developments, and the Department for Communities and the Department of Education should establish a collaborative, strategic approach to mixed housing and integrated education
- The Integrated Education Fund often pays start-up/expansion costs in integrated schools until Government is satisfied that demand exists. Where demand is proven this money should be repaid by Government so that the fund can recycle it for more investment.



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