

To: Equality Unit
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Issue: Policy on Supporting ethnic-minority children and young people who have English as an additional language

The Community Relations Council (CRC) is primarily concerned with promoting Community and Good Relations and the development of a shared and peaceful future. In recent years, CRC has actively sought to bring pressure to bear on all public agencies to take seriously the implications of 'A Shared Future' which has tasked government departments and agencies to develop and implement policies that establish ***'over time of a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all people are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence'***.

Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Our comments will relate directly as to how this policy proposal can feed into the aims and objectives of a number of government priorities. Council is primarily concerned with promoting sharing and collaboration between the various schools sectors which exist within Northern Ireland, to endeavour 'that pupils are consciously prepared for life in a diverse and inter-cultural society and world'¹. Furthermore the recent Bain Review and the Sustainable Schools policy reflect the changing school population and offer opportunities to build and strengthen partnerships, share best practice and resources to ensure children and young people are educated to a high level.

The Racial Equality Strategy complements ASF and these government priorities aim to deliver strategies and directives that will promote inclusivity, protect diversity and deliver services to meet the needs of our diverse society.

It is worth recapturing the recent changes in our community with regards to our new communities. Over the past number of years Northern Ireland has witnessed a growth in our migrant population. It is anticipated that this growth will be a trend for the foreseeable future and Council welcomes their contribution to our society which has enriched our experience of different cultures, traditions and minority faiths.

¹ A Shared Future, Page 24.

It is essential that government plan ahead for further changes and the Racial Equality Strategy noted 'the speed and extent of the increase in numbers of migrant workers in NI - and the sheer diversity of people involved –pose complex challenges for government and society alike'². The Department of Education must take account of this growing migration and ensure any final policy is proofed for future growth especially as recent figures reveal a new trend in migration from Eastern Europe rather than Eastern Asia, from non-commonwealth countries and from countries that do not necessarily have widespread use of the English language³.

Research also carried out by ICR on behalf of Belfast City Council cited that between April'04 and March'06 7,500 migrants arrived in Belfast (a conservative estimate) and that around 16% of these new migrants are children under the age of 16⁴; the additional figures from the Education and Library Boards reveal the increase in the number of English as an additional language (EAL) children across our towns and rural areas - last year 2,600 pupils with EAL enrolled in schools, an increase of 600 from previous years⁵. The concerns about quality of education for EAL students now face our schools on a much more widespread and immediate scale. Therefore it is essential to design a strategic policy that can deal with further migration and ensure EAL children and their parents do not face isolation or frustration within the education system.

Council consequently welcomes the development of a formal policy on how to educate EAL children and believe the establishment of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMSA) will provide schools with the much needed one-stop-shop to provide advice on translation and interpretation services, resources, best practice and new developments in this field of education.

This consultation comes after a further round of consultations carried out by the Department of Education with schools, teachers, parents, pupils and NGO's to determine the needs of children and young people who have little or no English. Currently the situation is far from suitable and many schools have been forced to put in place their own practices and procedures due to a lack of formal direction from the Department of Education. The development of this policy will be of huge relief to the schools, teacher, parents and pupils who have faced a language trap over the past few years and Council supports the view for the development of a 'single province-wide EAL service' which has been advocated by many including the Ulster Teacher's Union and Irish National Teachers Organisation.

The other proposals within the document also offer opportunities to deliver the objectives of ASF and Bain in terms of creating opportunities to collaborate and share resources and our comments will focus on these opportunities:

² Racial Equality Strategy

³ Changing Patterns & Future Planning – Migration & Northern Ireland, ICR. 2005

⁴ Press Release, Belfast City Council, May 2007.

⁵ INTO – Standing Conferences, page 43.

Training and professional development

At the moment there are examples of the few EAL staff in each of the Education and Library Boards working to full capacity, therefore, training for new and practicing teachers will be core to the success of this strategy. There are five teacher training institutions in Northern Ireland catering for both primary and post-primary education but unfortunately there is no training provided in teacher training colleges to prepare newly qualified teachers for the challenges in dealing with classrooms in which some or many of the pupils are not native speakers of English. The teacher training colleges should examine the opportunities to undertake this training jointly and as part of a wider programme of equity, diversity and interdependence. The current practical placements should enable trainee teachers to experience a variety of school sectors and enhance their teaching capabilities which reflect our growing diverse society. The Chief Inspector in her recent report recommended 'in teacher training, better strategies are needed to increase the extent of the contacts between student teachers from different community backgrounds...and develop their teaching competences in a more diverse range of schools through flexible teaching placements'⁶

The EMAS should develop in conjunction with key partners training programmes for current teachers on a collaborative approach. These training courses should occur on an area based arrangement which would also contribute to the sharing of good practice within a particular region. This approach should be rolled out across various teaching staff and classroom assistants to increase the level of collaboration. The regional co-ordinators should engage collectively to examine current and future needs of schools and pupils.

All training should be accredited to guarantee consistency and quality control. It is also important that an adequate timetable of training is programmed.

Resources

According to Teachers' Unions, schools have been calling for more help in terms of things like information packs and interpreting support for parents. The proposal to develop information/welcome packs will provide much needed assistance for teachers, parents and the children and help reduce barriers to accessing education. The development of these packs should be carried out in conjunction with parents and children providing guidance as to what information they should contain. Aspects of the information pack should be made available to the wider migrant population and support services e.g. libraries, employment agencies and advice centres, as well as local community organisations as many children arrive following a settling in period by their parents.

The production of teaching materials are key to this policy as they will help bridge barriers and help EAL pupils access different aspects of the curriculum. Schools should examine a system of sharing resources and monitoring what materials have the greatest impact.

⁶The Chief Inspector's Report 2004-2006. Page 17.

The proposals also include a recommendation to use ICT to improve EAL pupils and their parent's access to education – schools will have to keep in mind that not all homes have access to a personal computer and should make provision to enable access school computers to children and parents after school hours.

Develop links between homes, schools and communities.

Council agrees with this approach. Many of the consultees recommended homework clubs and after school club for EAL pupils. There is also the opportunity to link this provision with parents and language classes. There are examples of charities providing language classes to parents to which ultimately improves communication between the school and the parent e.g. St Vincent De Paul received funding from the Southern Investing for Health Partnership to provide English classes in Armagh and believe that enhancing their level of English will improve their ability to access necessary support services for education and employment. NICEM, SEEDS and STEP along with other support groups for migrant workers and minority ethnic communities provide similar services and schools should explore opportunities for linking in with these programmes for the parents of EAL pupils.

Language support for parents and adults is an important element in developing greater levels of integration and whilst this occurs on a partnership approach between community and voluntary organisations, it needs to be provided via other government departments – with sufficient funding allocated. EAL/ESOL provision is provided by the Further and Higher Education sector, but already this provision and funding appears to be stretched. Any further decrease in this provision will impact on the integration of adults and parents and restrict the level of communication with the various service deliverers

It is also worth taking the gender issue into consideration when arranging adult language classes as some employers and community groups have had to make specific arrangements to accommodate female learners due to family commitments.

Good practice

The EMAS aims to work with other educational services to promote partnerships and learn from best practice. Council recommends that the Department and the EMAS mirror the approach of the teacher's unions and make links with the schools in the Republic of Ireland and the UK. They have experienced similar migration trends but at a much faster curve. They have learned from bad practice. At the moment EAL students in the RoI are allocated two years language support and then undergo an evaluation – this is despite international evidence which shows that it takes a minimum of four years for EAL pupils to reach grade-level proficiency. This policy should take account of international guidance.

Funding

It is important that appropriate funding is provided to enable this policy to succeed. The funding for translation and interpreting services is currently sourced from the Children and Young People Strategy, however at the moment this funding is only

available until 2008/09. Furthermore, it may not have taken into account an increase in demand for these services over the funding period. It seems unlikely that requests for these services will decrease over the next few years and it is important to prepare for these continuing demands.

Partnerships

The success of this policy will depend very much on the different types of partnerships that are formed. Schools will have to co-operate on staff training, the development of training and teaching materials, and informing the EMAS of changing local trends. It will be important to expand the partnership approach to the wider community and find ways of maximising resources e.g. using community centres/schools for adult language classes. There are also opportunities of working with local businesses and councils to develop programmes or measures that can assist in provision of information to new comers on the different types of services available in the area and the key contacts.

It will also be necessary for DENI and the EMAS to liaise with other departments, housing authorities and NGO's to determine future trends in inward migration. This co-operation will assist with future proofing the policy.

Assess and monitor

Assessments and monitoring and evaluation are an important aspect of the strategy and it will be necessary to measure the progress of EAL pupils through the lifespan of the policy, evaluate the teaching materials and the type of training given to the education sector. The Department has stated that the policy is a flexible strategy, and Council believes the organic nature of the policy will enable EMAS to make modifications following evaluations and learning from best practice. Council would like further information on outcomes and the set of indicators that will be used to monitored the policy's effectiveness.

Council would like more information on the type of monitoring and data collection that takes place regarding the first language of pupils with EAL needs. It is important that statistics keep up with changing trends and ensure the data captured reflects the different European languages as well as East and South Asian languages.

Overall the Community Relations Council welcomes the development of a strategic central policy. On the whole the policy appears to address most of the issues raised during the consultation with the key stakeholders and the establishment of the EMAS will help deliver and co-ordinate the future development of EAL policy and good practice.

However it is unclear from the document if the policy is specifically designed as an EAL policy or as an ethnic minority children's educational policy. If it is the previous if would be helpful if it included detailed information on:

- Assessing EAL pupils – children enter the education sector at different ages and have different language capabilities. What tools will be used for assessing these children.

- Length of support - how long will support be in place for – evidence that it can take four years to gain a level of proficiency.

However if it is the latter, the final policy should include ways in which children who are not from an ethnic minority background can contribute in a positive way to welcoming EAL pupils and what measures can be implemented to maximise understanding and interaction. Other aspects include:

- exploration of the curriculum and how it can help develop our knowledge and respect towards our growing diversity e.g. explore the provision of educational resources for other European languages such as Polish and Russian e.g. Windmill Primary School in Dungannon for example last year helped to develop one of a series of information booklets called “Poland - A Cultural Glimpse” which provides basic information to teachers and students alike on Poland and all things Polish in an attempt to increase awareness and understanding of the growing Polish population in the school and local community. Furthermore Hazelwood Integrated College in Newtownabbey for the first time this year has offered Polish as a GCSE option for the growing number of Polish speaking students in its own and neighbouring schools.⁷ develop external partnerships with community and businesses

In conclusion, it is essential that we create an education structure that reflects these changing needs and moreover a system that commits itself to experimenting with new versions of educating our children together. Council recommends that collaboration is a focal point within the EMAS and its co-ordinators when it develops training, sharing of good practice and resources. Partnerships between the different schools should take place on a cross-sector and cross community basis therefore fulfilling the aims and objectives of ASF, Bain and contributing to a long-term sustainable approach. It is imperative that our education system develops a coherent approach to deal with children who have English as an additional language. The sector largely operates in a fragmented manner and consequently the implementation of this strategy by schools on an individual basis will limit its success - sharing and collaboration should be central to its implementation. A joined up approach will encourage more learning, widespread mapping of future needs and trends, and consequently develop an efficient sector that successfully educates children with language barriers.

⁷ Integrated Education Welcomes the Polish Community to Northern Ireland, NICIE