

To: RPA Division
Department of Education
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From: Community Relations Council
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RE: Review of Public Administration: Promoting Equality through the Review of Public Administration

Introduction

1. The Community Relations Council (CRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Equality Implications for the Review of Public Administration (RPA) on Education.
2. CRC's strategic aim is to promote a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society founded on the achievement of reconciliation, equality, co-operation, respect, mutual trust and good relations.+ We do this by:
 - Identifying and developing new and effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with people, organisations and government
 - Promoting the adoption of good relations policies and practice at local, community and institutional level
 - Assisting communities and institutions in working through and beyond the legacies of the conflict
3. In a changing environment, CRC works by promoting constructive and relevant dialogue, by actively supporting those taking real risks for relationship building, by acting as a practical bridge between groups in society and between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, and by promoting wider learning through developing better practice.
4. Council is totally committed to ending the inequalities in our education system and ensuring a fairer and more equal system for every child. In the interest of clarity the focus of this response will examine opportunities for promoting and improving good relations under RPA.

5. Process

- 5.1. Over the last few years Council has made a number of submissions to the Department on the transformative process of RPA and education. RPA offers huge potential for addressing equality issues and developing new ways of delivering educational services, which will ultimately benefit children, teachers, communities and our society. Those charged with implementing this change must take a holistic approach to education. It is essential to maximize partnership approaches in the delivery of services, improve standards in poor performing schools, add value to community development and cohesion, and contribute to reconciliation in our divided society.
- 5.2. The consultation document states that no EQIA will take place during this current phase, however, it affirms that EQIA will be undertaken in the forthcoming policy development phase. Council looks forward to contributing in the future, and stresses the need to consider equality issues (both section 75 (1) and (2) at all stages of development.

6. Good Relations & Education

- 6.1. CRC notes the Department's vision for education ~~to~~ educate and develop the young people to the highest standards, providing equality of access for all. Council supports this vision but would welcome a stronger recognition of the divided society in which the education sector sits and the role section 75 can play in contributing to conflict transformation .
- 6.2. The UNCR's recent report on Northern Ireland (October 2008) acknowledged this division and recommended that government should ~~take~~ measures to address segregation of education in Northern Ireland. Therefore it is necessary for the Department, ESA, Schools and Governors to examine how they can work towards addressing segregation.
- 6.3. Furthermore it is essential that children and young people are equipped to live and interact in a diverse society. It is necessary to build these skills and capacity within the context of a post-conflict society. This approach should be addressed within the various structures of education i.e. pre-school, primary, post-primary, tertiary, community and teacher training institutions.
- 6.4. The Department and its new structures must determine how they can play a key role in the reconciliation of our society. Most young people in the current education system have little experienced or remember little of the conflict, but the legacy of the past remains. The department will be aware that whilst the intensity of the conflict had diminished the severity of it has not. Unfortunately families, individuals and communities continue to face sectarian atrocities, such as murders, beatings, and attacks on church halls and orange halls etc. School children, of all ages, experience religious and community discrimination via the identification of their

school uniform, areas they travel through on their way to school, attacks on school buildings and the building of peacelines.

7. Opportunities

7.1. Education has a critical role in good relations. Whilst schools offer protection but they must also create a safe place for discussion and create the opportunities for sustained and meaningful engagement on a cross-sectoral-community basis. There are real opportunities if they are grasped:

7.2. Rationalisation of the schools estate. The economies of surplus places offers an excellent opportunity to encourage new ways of delivering education in a particular geographic area. At the moment there are too many schools and the number of surplus places is expected to increase to 80,000 by 2015. It is therefore important that any future rationalization programme is taken forward in an area-based planning approach. This approach must consider good relations i.e. schools, governing bodies and local communities should be encouraged to look at how educational services can be sustained within their particular locality by working in partnership with other providers. It should not merely result in the streamlining of the individual sectors but rather encourage new ways of aligning the current services on a cross-sectoral-community basis.

7.3. Entitlement framework.

Equal access to the curriculum is important in terms of ensuring equal opportunities for children and young people, regardless of sector or location of their school. The delivery of the entitlement framework offers huge potential for collaboration. There are many schools that are unable to offer the full range of 24/27 subjects and DE and ESA should develop policies and operational approaches that will enable schools to collaborate in order to provide access to the full curriculum. There are many ways in which this can be done:

- Attending classes in neighbouring schools
- Sharing teachers between schools in a particular catchment areas and area based planning boundaries
- Sharing facilities e.g. sports/technology/arts/science facilities
- Accessing designated specialist schools

7.4. The Curriculum

7.4.1. Promoting Development and Mutual Understanding, and Learning for Life and Work are key aspects of the curriculum that contribute to the promotion of good relations. Schools must also reflect on the impact of the past on young people; it is crucial that young people are assisted in exploring and understanding their roles and responsibilities in the peace process in respect of conflict transformation, reconciliation and civic leadership. These issues

must be addressed in the context of sectarianism and racism as society has grown and will continue to grow as a multi cultural region with a growing number of faiths and traditions. It is important these issues are viewed as key areas of learning as it provides children and young people with the skills and ability to engage with difference, respect diversity and challenge discrimination.

7.4.2. Paul Connolly's research '*Too Young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland*' counteracts the widely held belief that young children have no sense of cultural differences and showed for the first time the significant affect that cultural and political influence has on the awareness and behaviour of 3-6 year-olds in Northern Ireland. The report also demonstrates the increased likelihood of children to identify with a particular community as they grow older and significantly, to make sectarian statements or take actions accordingly. This links in with initiatives such as the Media Initiatives for Children . introduced to children from the age of 3, and currently in all voluntary pre-school clubs. This program is helping to develop positive attitudes towards diversity from an early age, and it is essential that this good work is mainstreamed throughout the educational system.

7.4.3. Council is aware of the current review taking place on community relations in school and we look forward to contributing to this review in due process. As well as the review, Council is interested in the mainstreaming of community relations throughout the curriculum and educational structures. ESA and the department have a responsibility for communicating a vision of sharing and collaboration to the various service providers. In order to encourage this type of partnership approach it would be beneficial to provide practical examples of how these partnerships can bring real benefits to a child's educational experience e.g. IFI have recently funded a 3 year project for a whole school approach with 18 schools. The programme involves working with governors, senior management, teachers, and students at nursery, primary and post-primary level to implement a progressive community relations programme. It is intended to disseminate this learning across the educational sector.

7.4.4. Council has many more examples of best practice and we welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with the department.

7.5. Current collaboration

7.5.1. ESA will have a key role in planning and improving outcomes for schools and children, and collaborative intervention can play a huge role in improving access to the curriculum and attainment.

7.5.2. The realities of sharing and partnership already exist in Learning Communities. This collaboration has taken place for a number of reasons - strong relationships between school principals and close proximity of schools have been the context for many partnerships e.g.

Limavady and Ballycastle. The new shared campus proposed for the Lissanelly site reveals a new vision of education provision in Co Tyrone. Unfortunately there have been more serious causes for this type of intervention i.e. the murder of Michael McIlveen saw schools in Ballymena coming together to tackle sectarianism collectively. A tragic event but recognition by the schools that they could play an important role in building safe spaces for the children in the area.

7.5.3. Sustaining educational provision in a locality will help develop and sustain community cohesion. It will not be enough to let this type of engagement happen ad hoc, rather it has to be actively pursued and schools shown the benefits both for the children and the community.

7.5.4. CRC calls on the Department to develop strategic policies that proactively encourage schools to examine options for their areas on a cross-sectoral-community basis. The laissez-faire approach will not deliver a corporate approach.

7.6. Attainment & disparity

7.6.1. Many schools experience similar circumstances but their performances vary greatly. Under RPA monitoring school performance and intervening and supporting as necessary is identified as a key responsibility for ESA and this includes working with schools that have comparable situations to consider how they can improve outcomes and experiences. Again this should be pursued on a cross-sectoral-community basis.

7.6.2. There are also opportunities through mentoring schemes and peer support projects for these schools - learn from each other and implement change. This collaboration should run throughout the school structure i.e. principals, teachers, teaching assistants and governors etc.

7.6.3. This approach could also help address the differences that are happening along community and religious background. A recent report by the Equality Commission revealed that Roman Catholic students (40%) were more likely than Protestant students (34%) to progress onto Higher Education. By contrast, Protestant students (32%) were more likely than Roman Catholic students (24%) to go on to Further Education. This may be influenced by a number of factors, including different levels of educational attainment, aspirations and culture, for example, Roman Catholic school leavers (47%) were more likely than Protestant school leavers (41%) to have 2 or more AqLevels on leaving school.

7.7. Teacher Training

7.7.1. Teacher training largely takes place on a sectoral basis. There should be more collaboration between the teacher training institutions to ensure teachers have the capacity to teach in a diverse society. It

seems logical that if sustained sharing on a cross community basis is the vision then we need to ensure teaching staff are equipped with the essentials skills to deliver education in a shared environment. This will be crucial in terms of the estates rationalisation whereby pupils from different schools may join a school with a different ethos. It is essential that new students feel they are entering an inclusive and all-encompassing school environment.

7.7.2. ESA as the employer should develop a set of minimum standards that will enhance the teacher training experience e.g. that all new teach training courses/programmes must encompass an element of teaching in another sector.

7.8. Governance

7.8.1. CRC supports governing structures that reflect our society and encourages schools and ESA to promote representative Board of Governors and Management structures.

7.8.2. Governors within a particular area should meet to discuss educational provision in their area and examine possibilities for partnership.

7.8.3. Teacher and Continuing Professional Development programmes should encourage formal linkages with schools on a number of levels:

- Geographic
- Social background
- Attainment

This will increase knowledge of interventions that have been used to tackle difficult issues and provide opportunities for discussion between and across the sectors.

7.9. Extended Schools

7.9.1. The extended schools programme offers schools an opportunity to collaborate, particularly with the incentivised criteria of clustering Council urges ESA and the Department to promote the benefits of collaborating cross sectorally as this would maximize benefits for communities experiencing social deprivation.

7.9.2. In order to maximize community usage of school facilities it is necessary to examine potential barriers that may reduce access i.e. communities living on an interface may not feel safe accessing the school. ESA, schools and governors should consider ways to reduce community fears and ensure facilities are welcoming to the whole community.

7.10. RAP & Community Planning

7.10.1. Council would be interested in examining how schools and local government can bring value to each others work. For example, local councils are responsible for allocating funding which promotes good relations. In terms of area base planning it would be worthwhile

examining how the work of schools and community organizations can maximize outcomes for a particular area.

7.10.2. Council seeks clarification how the proposed structures and boundaries in terms of getting best value from community planning when it becomes a reality.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Council hopes the Department will consider the above suggestions as a way of embedding good relations within RPA and Education. Council looks forward to contributing to the process over the coming months.

END

ⁱ ECNI, “Educational Migration & Non-Return in Northern Ireland” 2009