

Education and a shared future

Options for sharing and collaboration
in Northern Ireland schools

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Introduction

A Shared Future?

When people from different ethnic, religious or national communities have decided to live together peacefully, it becomes necessary to consider both how much they are going to share and on what basis this sharing might occur. To help answer these questions elected representatives, and those who advise them, may decide there is a need for a strategic framework—one that sets a direction for public policy and against which the effectiveness of government initiatives to promote sharing can be measured. But this will not always be the case. Sharing is, after all, a complex and even complicated business, and the idea of developing a strategic framework that determines how and what to share may be viewed as an unnecessary constraint or limitation. Indeed, decisions of this sort might just as readily be made piecemeal through ongoing deliberations in response to a given area of public policy and which afford decision-makers a greater degree of freedom and flexibility.

In Northern Ireland the principle of sharing is a crucial component of the transition from violent conflict to peaceful democracy. Its significance is symbolically captured by the constitutional and political settlements of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, Northern Ireland Act 1998 and St. Andrew's Agreement. Not only are the questions of how and on what basis to share addressed by these documents, but crucially, the reasons for doing so and the intended objectives are also detailed. Members of the Assembly are therefore compelled 'to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements'.¹ Government ministers are required to 'operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment'.² Public authorities are obligated to 'have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group'.³

Sharing is intended to be much more, it seems, than a pragmatic bargain. It is the *raison d'être* of an envisaged and emerging society. Determining what it means to live together, therefore, is to shape the structural and procedural foundations of a pluralist Northern Ireland. And, it is reasonable to assume, that following the commitments made by elected representatives, legislation, policies and financial support for sharing would be guaranteed. A strategic framework, appropriately entitled *A Shared Future*, certainly indicated that this assumption might be correct. *A Shared Future* committed government to establishing over time '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'.⁴ It called for a society where there is 'equity, respect for diversity and a recognition and acceptance of our interdependency'.⁵

But *A Shared Future* went further than principled statements and normative ideals. It also involved commitments to undertaking difficult practical work tackling the visible manifestations of division and addressing displays of sectarian aggression such as flags, paramilitary murals and kerb-paintings. Public space was to be reclaimed and made safe for meeting, playing, working and living together, with a particular focus on protecting town and city centres as neutral civic venues. A long-term approach was to be developed for addressing the needs of interfaces where violence between the members of different communities has been recurrent. Integrated residential areas were to be supported and become a central focus of housing policy and planning. The duplication of public service provision as a result of the conflict in areas such as health and transport were to be addressed. Opportunities for shared and inter-cultural learning were to be provided in education, with civic-mindedness promoted through citizenship teaching, and an understanding of the complex history of Northern Ireland encouraged through a common school curriculum. Finally, any government funded project, 'whether single identity or cross-community', was to 'be tested in relation to the quality of outcomes and its ability to promote the building of good relationships'.⁶

The problem with *A Shared Future* however, is that while it may appear to reflect the constitutional and political settlements agreed in Northern Ireland, it does not carry the equivalent legislative authority. Moreover, those engaged with the issue cannot have failed to notice that the strategic framework for sharing has lacked any tangible momentum generated by locally elected representatives. Admittedly, following the Agreement, the first devolved administration did, in its programme for government, undertake to review community relations policy and practice. But beyond this initial tentative commitment, Northern Ireland's elected representatives have, for the most part, had little to do with *A Shared Future*. Indeed, the framework itself was principally developed when the legislative Assembly was suspended, with responsibility falling to the incumbent Secretary of State, the Northern Ireland Office Minister in receipt of the relevant portfolio, and a number of key civil servants.

Those ostensibly responsible for *A Shared Future* did succeed in its progression. A cross-departmental Good Relations Panel chaired by the Head of the Civil Service was set up to consider implementation and all government departments agreed targets to be included in the publication of a *Triennial Action Plan*.⁷ But on the two occasions when locally elected representatives formally debated sharing, the content of their deliberations and the resolutions achieved were less than convincing. On 17 June 2004 the Northern

Ireland Grand Committee at Westminster afforded a total of 14 Members of Parliament representing the Democratic Unionist Party, Ulster Unionist Party and Social Democratic and Labour Party one afternoon of substantive discussion. The members of Sinn Féin, who refuse to take their seats, did not take part in the debate, and the Alliance Party could not take part since it had no parliamentary seats.⁸ On the 4 June 2007 the legislative Assembly had an opportunity to further consider the matter. On this occasion all of the main political parties were represented and resolved to note the 'direction of and underpinning principles contained in the documents *A Shared Future* (March 2005) and *A Shared Future: Triennial Action Plan* (April 2006),' and recognised that the government 'will wish to consider carefully the progress to date and bring forward detailed plans, consistent with the pledge of office, to promote the interests of the whole community towards the goal of a shared future and a prosperous, peaceful and settled society'.⁹

A strategic framework for sharing may or may not be agreed by locally elected representatives in Northern Ireland. The following report does not aim to draw any conclusion on this matter. To do so, in a society where so many commentators have been surprised and bewildered by the turn of events, would be at best a hostage to fortune and at worst foolhardy. So, instead, we are going to start from the undeniable facts. Sharing is a reality of the political and social condition of Northern Ireland. It is the context within which the legislative Assembly operates and as consequence there are no areas of public policy unaffected by the resolve of unionism and nationalism, Protestantism and Catholicism to live together. Beyond politics, how to share and on what basis it might occur is perhaps a secondary issue, but it cannot be ignored by those who design and implement public policies. To do so would be akin to burying our heads in the sand in order to ignore the reality of living in a pluralist society. Deciding how to share carries significant logistical, financial and social implications.¹⁰ Refusing to interrogate sharing, countenance its relevance to an area of public policy, or wilfully ignoring the issue, amounts to mismanagement and risks the charge of incompetence.

Accordingly, this report considers the case of education. As a single substantive area of public policy, sharing in and between schools has long been a subject of debate. In a society characterised by the competing claims for recognition from different ethnic, religious or national communities, education is an important concern. Since culture and identity are often the very things perceived to be at most risk in a pluralist context like Northern Ireland, so it follows that schools increasingly become a salient political issue. Successive governments in Northern Ireland

have agreed that as many schools as possible should play a 'powerful and positive role in normalising society, helping to make it sustainable and vibrant, with greater sharing among communities'.¹¹ But there is considerable disagreement as to how this objective might be delivered and an equally substantial degree of ambiguity on behalf of those charged with its design as to what educational sharing means in practice.

In 2006, an *Independent Strategic Review of Education* suggested that sharing in and between schools meant that those who would favour supporting hermetically sealed Protestant and Catholic communities or, more generally, the exclusion of those who are 'different' should in future receive less support. The Review argued that in good schools 'children should grow up to feel comfortable in their own uniqueness, and comfortable with difference. For that to happen they need to be able to work together and "play" together, so that eventually they can assume a shared responsibility for their future'.¹² This determination not only goes some way towards clarifying what is meant by sharing in education, but also indicates that sharing is considered necessary in order to promote peace and social cohesion as a stated educational objective. The Review did not stop at this single recommendation. On the contrary, it went much further still, arguing that 'on the basis of clear criteria to be developed, projects relating to new schools, re-organisation or rationalisation are more likely to justify receipt of financial support if they are shared or operate across the community divide'.¹³ Building 'relationships through acknowledging and celebrating identity and diversity and bringing differences together for mutual benefit is', we are informed 'a vital part of the process'.¹⁴ The question is to what extent is this determination correct, and if it is correct, how might the required outcome be delivered?

Sharing: more is better than less

If the members of a divided society are to live together and make their society work, then clearly there must be some sharing. Living together means that the lives of people from different communities will inevitably intersect. How much sharing, though, can be an extremely difficult question for them to answer. As we have just indicated, those responsible for the *Independent Strategic Review of Education* answered this question in a strongly determinate fashion. In essence, the Review argued that children from different backgrounds – Catholic, Protestant or 'other' – should be educated together as much as possible; correspondingly, different types schools should be shared spaces that are open to and welcoming of children and young people from across the community divide.¹⁵ This is a widely heard view and, on the face of it, there are some good arguments to which its defenders might appeal.

In what follows we consider two such arguments – an argument based on a certain reading of human identity and an argument based on a certain reading of reconciliation. We think these arguments have some merit. But, for reasons that should become clearer later on from our discussion, we also think that the arguments are somewhat overstated and hence do not have quite the appeal that their defenders claim for them.

The argument from identity

One way in which the claim that schools should be shared or operate across the community divide might be justified is by appealing to a social constructivist account of identity.

Arguments of this sort typically start by rejecting the claim that group identity is fixed or immutable, on the grounds that such a claim fails to account for the diversity of human experience. It may be true that our personal identity is coloured to one extent or another by the groups to which we happen to belong. But to think that personal identity can be reduced to group identity is mistaken, since personal identity is a fluid social construct that is negotiated in relation to others. Thus, in this vein, Amartya Sen argues that:

We are all individually involved in identities of various kinds in disparate contexts, in our own respective lives, arising from our background, or associations, or social activities... The same person can be a British citizen, of Malaysian origin, with Chinese racial characteristics, a stockbroker, a non-vegetarian, an asthmatic, a linguist, a body-builder, a poet, an opponent of abortion, a bird-watcher, an astrologer, and one who believes that God created Darwin to test the gullible.¹⁶

On this social constructivist view, personal identity is a not a given fact but plays itself out differently in different contexts. By the same token, group identity will mean different things to different people, depending on their social location, economic position, gender, sexuality, and so forth.

For those who adhere to a social constructivist view of identity and identity formation, locking people into the groups to which they happen to belong is both empirically and morally misguided. For some people, group belonging will be extremely important to their sense of personal identity. Group norms and values may provide them with a social compass by means of which they negotiate their way through life. Yet while group identities might therefore need to be positively recognised or accommodated, the worry is that accommodation can come at an extremely high cost for those members who do not wish to make their group identity central to their personal identity.

A good example of what is at stake here involves the legal entitlement that parents have to ensure an education for their children 'in conformity with their own religious or philosophical convictions.'¹⁷ There is no equivalent right afforded to, for example, religious groups. However, churches do have an interest in ensuring their own cultural reproduction, and, to the extent that this is the case, parents may find they are put under considerable pressure to send their children to a particular school type in order to ensure their continued good standing within the faith community.¹⁸ In short, there is both a concern and risk that group recognition and accommodation may amount to a restriction of individual freedom.

When this approach is rigidly institutionalised, it becomes difficult for those who want to treat their group identity as a private personal matter. It creates expectations about how individuals ought to behave and binds them to cultural 'scripts' or 'narratives' over which they have too little authorial control. Moreover, this approach can have a particularly negative consequence in divided societies, with which we must be seriously concerned. Effectively pigeonholing people into one of a limited number of fixed identities – Bosniak, Serb or Croat, Anglo-phone or Franco-phone, Muslim or Christian – may unwittingly raise a set of social barriers that hinder the creation of a meaningful public solidarity upon which longer-term stability depends.¹⁹ Ultimately group recognition or accommodation may, if left unchecked, lend itself to reifying or even serving to increase many of the hostilities and prejudices that it should be our intention to remove.

It is perhaps easy to see how a social constructivist argument of this latter sort might lend support to the view that, as far as education in Northern Ireland is concerned, children and young people should be educated together and why schools should be organised on a cross-community basis. More generally, it is easy to see how social constructivism might lend support to the view that the education system should be based on more rather than less sharing. If we take individual choice as our moral starting point, then we should not lock children and young people into particular ways of life or bind their personal identity to the identity of the group to which they happen to belong. Instead, we should ensure that children young people are educated in a context in which they are exposed to as broad a range of social outlooks as possible, so that they can have the broadest possible set of social options from which to choose in defining their personal identity.²⁰

As the contemporary political philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, has pointed out, one consequence of this social constructivist argument is that although pluralist societies may need to afford institutional recognition or

accommodation to particular groups or communities, institutional recognition or accommodation is not to be treated as a kind of preservation of species by administrative means' and hence cannot guarantee the survival of any particular group or way of life:

Cultural heritages and the forms of life articulated in them normally reproduce themselves by convincing those whose personality structures they shape, that is, by motivating them to appropriate productively and continue the traditions. The constitutional state can make this hermeneutic achievement of the cultural reproduction of lifeworlds possible, but it cannot guarantee it. For to guarantee survival would necessarily rob the members of the very freedom to say yes or no that is necessary if they are to appropriate and preserve their cultural heritage.²¹

Habermas takes it to be an anthropological fact that rigid forms of group or communal life atrophy and die away. But even if this were not the case, a moral commitment to individual freedom militates against attempts at institutionally preserving group or communal identities. On this view, cultures are important and deserve to be protected only insofar as they allow us to recognise their members as individual persons and aid them in their efforts to develop their own sense of personal identity. As long as we keep this principle in mind, the amount of diversity that comes about will be the morally right amount of diversity.

In just a moment, we will question whether this social constructivist outlook is as convincing as it may at first appear – or, more specifically, whether it must inevitably lead to the view that more sharing is better than less. Before proceeding with this question, however, we wish to introduce a second argument to which one might appeal in support of the case for greater sharing in and between schools. As with the argument just considered, the general contours of this second argument will be familiar to readers of this report.

The argument from reconciliation

The argument that schools should be shared or operate across the community divide may also appeal to notions of reconciliation. Here the claim is that an education system should promote social goods such as mutual understanding, trust, respect and so forth, on the grounds that those goods are integral to reconciliation.

In this vein, Sir George Bain, Chair of the *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, writes as follows:

At the beginning of the Review's work, I thought it would be mainly concerned with the issue of "surplus

places” and the economic case – cost-effective provision that gives good value for money – for rationalising the schools’ estate. As the work advanced, the economic case for rationalisation remained important, but two other arguments for rationalisation became even more important: first, the educational case – access for pupils to the full range of the curriculum, to high quality teaching, and to modern facilities – and second, the social case – societal well-being by promoting a culture of tolerance, mutual understanding, and inter-relationship through significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning.²²

As such, Bain argued that changes to the educational system in Northern Ireland should be driven not simply by a concern for money, but also by a concern for education and reconciliation. If we want to build a better society for everyone in Northern Ireland, we need to give children and young people the best possible education. We also need to teach them the importance of toleration, mutual understanding, and the like, since values of this sort serve the wider interests of social cohesion.

Although education and reconciliation are obviously two different kinds of enterprise or activity, they are often linked together. Here the argument is that education should be an engine of reconciliation, driving the process forward and ensuring a shared future for everyone in Northern Ireland, rather than a future that is merely shared out. As a central tenet of education policy, the promotion of peace and social cohesion among religious, ethnic or national groups is broadly supported at an international level. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that education should be directed towards ‘the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and from civilization different from his or her own’.²³ This commitment has been interpreted to include the ‘recognition of the need for a balanced approach to education and one which succeeds in reconciling diverse values through dialogue and respect for difference’.²⁴ To this end, it is often argued that schools should be shared, since it is only by educating children and young people together that old wounds can be healed and reconciliation can be achieved.

In support of this claim, those who advocate greater (rather than lesser) degrees of sharing often point to the (purported) benefits of ‘contact’. In essence, the basic assumption here is that the best way to reduce tension and hostility between groups is to bring them into systematic contact with each other in various ways.²⁵ In order for this to occur, a number of conditions must be met:

- The contact situation must promote the equal standing of those involved (at a minimum, it must not reinforce stereotypical perceptions)
- Those involved must be able to view themselves as engaged in a cooperative activity that aims at a common goal (sometimes referred to as a ‘super-ordinate’ goal)
- The contact situation must promote personal interaction among those involved so that they can get to know one another as individuals (rather than merely as group members)
- The contact situation must be underpinning by common norms and values which support the personal interactions of those involved.

Insofar as these four conditions can be satisfied, the implications for education reform are clear enough. If our aim is to promote reconciliation through education, we should bring children and young people within shared schools so that they can meaningfully engage with one another. Correspondingly, we should educate young people and children together through a broad or inclusive curriculum that, among other things, helps them to dismantle demeaning stereotypes and related forms of behaviour.

This ‘contact hypothesis’ has tremendous currency among some educationalists in Northern Ireland. For example, as part of this research project, we interviewed representatives of the various school sectors. One representative of the Integrated sector put the point this way to us: ‘No one is saying single-identity schools are sectarian. But what we are saying is ...there’s plenty of evidence ... that contact when it is sustained and it’s done in a way that is quality, does produce people who are better disposed to the other.’

Up to a point, we agree with sentiment expressed in this quotation. If contact is carefully structured, it can have a significantly positive outcome for those children who experience it. Pluralism within the classroom it seems reduces prejudicial attitudes more generally and leads to a reduction in the political saliency of group identities, and hence, quality contact can play its part in encouraging greater levels of integration.²⁶ However, we also think this sentiment begs the question in that, arguably, it assumes more than it proves. ‘Quality’ contact may have beneficial results in terms of promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. But it may be too much to assume that quality contact is always possible.

Sharing: more is not always better than less

Up to now, we have described two possible arguments to which one might appeal in defence of the claim that children and young people should be educated together

within shared schools. The first of those arguments turned on the claim that, because human identity is socially constructed, it makes little sense to build an education system that treats group identities as if they are fixed or immutable. Consequently, children and young people should be educated together so that they can freely choose, within the broadest context possible, which aspects of their identity they will prioritise. The second argument turns on the need to promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Here the claim was that if members of the two main communities are eventually to overcome their deepest differences, it is necessary to bring children and young people into contact with one another under appropriately structured educational conditions.

If these two arguments were correct, they would support an education policy that presses for greater levels of sharing (or, alternatively, for lower levels of separation). It is far from clear, however, that they are correct. In what follows, we argue that the first contention—the argument from identity – is based on a confusion or conflation of two levels of social and political analysis. We also argue that the second contention – the argument from reconciliation – depends on conditions that may not be sustainable in the real world. In sum, we argue that the case of greater sharing is not nearly as clear-cut as it might initially seem.

The argument from identity revisited

In order to see what is wrong with the argument from identity as it is normally presented, one needs to appreciate a number of important distinctions that are often conflated or simply overlooked.

The argument from identity is basically an ontological assertion – that is, it is an argument about the factors that account for social life. Here the main line of debate divides ‘atomists’ from ‘holists’. Atomists reject the Aristotelian view that ‘man is a social animal’ and instead affirm the status of the individual prior to all such communal bonds of affiliation: individuals come first, community comes second. By contrast, holists argue that we only become the people that we are by virtue of the fact that we belong to one type of culture or community rather than another: community comes first, individuals come second.

The way in which we see ourselves as social beings delimits the real choices that are available to us. For example, if I am a committed holist, it may make sense for me to advocate social policies that benefit the wider community rather than policies that serve individual ends alone. Yet this conclusion need not necessarily follow since either stand on the atomism-holism debate can be combined with either stand on the communalist-individualist debate, these positions are not mutually exclusive.

These last comments may appear somewhat abstract, but they do have crucial implications for our thinking about and assessment of the degree of sharing that ought to characterise Northern Ireland’s education system. As we noted above, there is a strong argument to the effect that, since individual identity is fluid and contested – that is, since it is socially constructed rather than socially given – it is wrong to lock children and young people into particular ways of life or bind their personal identity to the identity of the group to which they happen to belong. There is, however, no principled reason why a commitment to social constructivism must lead to argue in favour of greater levels of sharing. One might accept that individual identity is fluid and contested, but still conclude that what Northern Ireland needs is an education system that leans more towards the separation end of the continuum than towards the sharing end.

The reasoning here might go something like the following. People in Northern Ireland are no different to people anywhere else. They are not born Protestant or Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist, but build their personal identities out of the pallet of social and political opportunities that are before them. However, the realities of life in Northern Ireland are such that, although identities are socially constructed, they tend to be highly oppositional and hence durable. In other words, what matters for our assessment of the best policies to implement is how people *perceive* their identities.²⁷

The underlying conflicts that persist in many divided societies is driven by a demand for the recognition and accommodation of particular interests. Claimants – such as ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Francophones in Canada, Basque nationalists in Spain and the Kurdish population in Turkey – assume that conventional democratic frameworks have failed to address some of the processes that prevent them from achieving equality. To address these concerns a policy of separation therefore, so as to enable religious, ethnic or national groups to have control over their own internal affairs may in fact prove to be as useful as increased sharing. Limited separation not only embraces diversity as a condition of social and political life, but, is premised upon the assumption that society will function better as a consociation or federation of communities.²⁸

It is not always obvious, of course, why different identities deserve so much of our attention. With respect to the principal denominations of Christianity in Northern Ireland, for example, it may appear that a demand for separate schools constitutes little more than a trivial concentration upon minor variants of the same faith. And yet, although

the differences between people may appear minor to the casual observer, this does not mean that they are perceived as being any less real by the people themselves, nor for that matter, does it render them more amenable to quick fixes.²⁹ Grasping the genuine desire that people have in maintaining their 'small' differences is often crucial to developing a fuller appreciation of why demands for recognition, and, in response, support for a policy of limited separation, is typical in so many societies. It is right, or so the argument goes, that the members of religious, ethnic or national groups have the opportunity to maintain a distinct culture, if they so choose. Perhaps nowhere is this *raison d'être* more evident than when it comes to justifying separate schools. Education is critical to the perpetuation and transmission of culture within and across generations, and so, it is argued to make perfect sense that schools should be a salient issue for those who demand their particular way of life is protected.³⁰

It is crucial to stress that, as a research team, we do not take a position here one way or the other: we do not argue for communalism or for individualism. Nor did we begin or conduct this research with the aim of advocating some particular policy position. What we do contend, however, is that there is no necessary correlation between the view that a person holds at the ontological level and the view that one holds at the policy level. The two are often closely related, of course. But the tendency to conflate them has done little to clarify the predicament that people in Northern Ireland find themselves *vis-à-vis* designing the best possible education system. Although social constructivists may have a valid argument in advocating greater levels of sharing, it is far too quick to conclude that a particular policy direction must, as a consequence, follow.

Consequently, therefore, as far as the argument from identity is concerned, the degree of sharing remains an open question. Perhaps more accurately, arguments from identity (i.e., social constructivist arguments) although important, are not necessarily decisive.

The argument from reconciliation revisited

So what, then, of the argument from reconciliation? Is it as sound or conclusive as many contributors to the Northern Ireland education debate assume? Was the *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, right to argue that 'significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning' would be required before Northern Ireland developed into a society characterised by 'a culture of tolerance' and 'mutual understanding'? Once again, the argument here is not as decisive or determinate as one might think.

It is taken as 'an article of faith' in many quarters that high levels of sharing are necessary for reconciliation – and by corollary that separation is inimical to reconciliation. Thus, for example, Keith Porteus Wood, General Secretary of the National Secular Society, argues that 'children of all races and creeds need to mix if we are ever to eradicate racism and religious prejudice', an argument endorsed by Professor Richard Dawkins with specific reference to the case of Northern Ireland. According to Dawkins, 'if Protestant and Catholic children ceased to be segregated throughout their schooldays, the troubles would largely disappear'.³¹ And indeed there is some evidence to support Dawkin's view. For example, one study by Cairns, Dunn and Giles in 1993 showed:

how little young people from each community know about their counterparts, and how few opportunities there were for meetings and contacts ... While pupils in both types of school [i.e., Protestant and Catholic] often studied world religions such as Buddhism or Islam, they were very unlikely to study the religion of their nearest neighbours.³²

However, there are also studies which point in the opposite direction. In his survey, Geoffrey Short points to a broad swathe of research suggesting that separate education has not lead to a deepening of divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.³³ This body of research suggests that separate education is not a cause of division but rather a reflection of division – as such, it is a contingent truth rather than a necessary truth and cannot be directly blamed for failures of reconciliation and social healing. On the contrary, researchers have found a considerable amount of material that aims to promote tolerance, mutual understanding and education for reconciliation in the curriculum of both Controlled (predominantly Protestant) and Catholic schools.³⁴

Of course, there is a major difference between arguing that separate schools do not inhibit reconciliation and arguing that separate schools promote integration, since much will depend on the degree and type of separation at issue. But for now, it is important to stress just why the assumption that the more sharing there is the better the chances of reconciliation should not simply be accepted at face value. To this end, let us return to the 'contact hypothesis' discussed above.

Although much is often made of the contact hypothesis, the claims that are made for it need to be treated very carefully. Indeed, there is a great deal of research showing that early versions of this hypothesis were both naïve and misleading.

As Gordon Allport put it, 'it has sometimes been held that merely by assembling people without regard for race, colour, religion or national origin, we can thereby destroy stereotypes and develop friendly attitudes. The case is not so simple'.³⁵ He went on to note that 'whether or not the law of peaceful progression will hold seems to depend on the nature of the contact that is established'.³⁶

Researchers have identified four conditions that need to be satisfied if contact is to be effective in reducing prejudice:

1. If contact is to produce beneficial effects and hence aid the cause of reconciliation, there must be the potential for real or genuine acquaintance. In particular, research suggests that those taking part have to interact in circumstances in which they can get to know each other as individuals
2. The social norms of the contact situation must favour group equality and equalitarian inter-group association. In other words, the contact situation must be constructed or organized so that inequality of power, which almost always lead to coercion of one form or another, are reduced so far as possible
3. Those involved in the contact situation must not reinforce stereotypical perceptions but must instead be open to revising their perception of the other. As such, those involved must be open-minded and willing to recognise the other on terms that the other finds fitting or appropriate
4. There has to be a mutually interdependent relationship between all of those participating in the contact situation. That is, those involved in the contact situation must be able to think of themselves as engaged in a cooperative venture in pursuit of a joint or shared goal.³⁵

The trouble is, however, that these four conditions (and in particular those relating to stereotypical exemplars and social support for the contact) are extremely difficult to establish and maintain. Indeed, researchers have found that 'when other (sometimes opposing) conditions obtain, contact tends to worsen the inter-personal attitudes of those taking part'.³⁶ Because appropriate conditions cannot be guaranteed, children and young people from the minority community who are denied separate schooling may find themselves in a learning context that is inimical to their interests. Indeed, there is a plausible line of argument which suggests that children raised or educated in a single identity context may, by the very virtue of the confidence and security gained by that environment, be better placed to engage in a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding with those from 'other' cultural or faith backgrounds.

In arguing that sharing may not serve the interests of some children, we are not saying that sharing is necessarily less desirable or that contact cannot have mutually beneficial effects. It most certainly can. Our point, however, is that the contact hypothesis needs to be treated very carefully. If contact or sharing in schools is to promote the cause of reconciliation, then it will need to be supported by a range of social initiatives beyond the school. In other words, reconciliation cannot nor should not be left to schools alone. They can play their part; but that part is necessarily limited. What is more, there may, depending on the circumstances, be room for a considerable degree of variation in approach. These factors mean that, although increased levels of sharing may be the preferred long term option, there is no *a priori* reason to think that separate schools cannot play their part in promoting reconciliation.

Where to from here?

We mentioned above that there is a major difference between arguing that separate schools do not inhibit reconciliation and arguing that separate schools promote integration, since much will depend on the degree and type of separation at issue. The point is, however, that judgments of this sort are highly contingent – they depend, for instance, on the type of society in question, the willingness of the various parties to take the broader view, the degree to which diversity is genuinely valued, the political context, economic factors, and so forth. What follows from our analytical discussion above is that, if, therefore in theory, any school can indeed play a part in promoting reconciliation then the matter becomes an empirical one. What approaches might be adopted? What, if anything are people willing to accept in terms of shared education? What lessons can Northern Ireland learn from other places that have attempted to address the same or similar challenges?

In this report, sharing in and between schools is examined. In particular, what a pluralist Northern Ireland education system might look like in practice and how this is understood by those responsible for its design and implementation, the opinions of those working within the system and the parents of children in schools, is considered at length, with a particular focus on two essential and interdependent concepts:

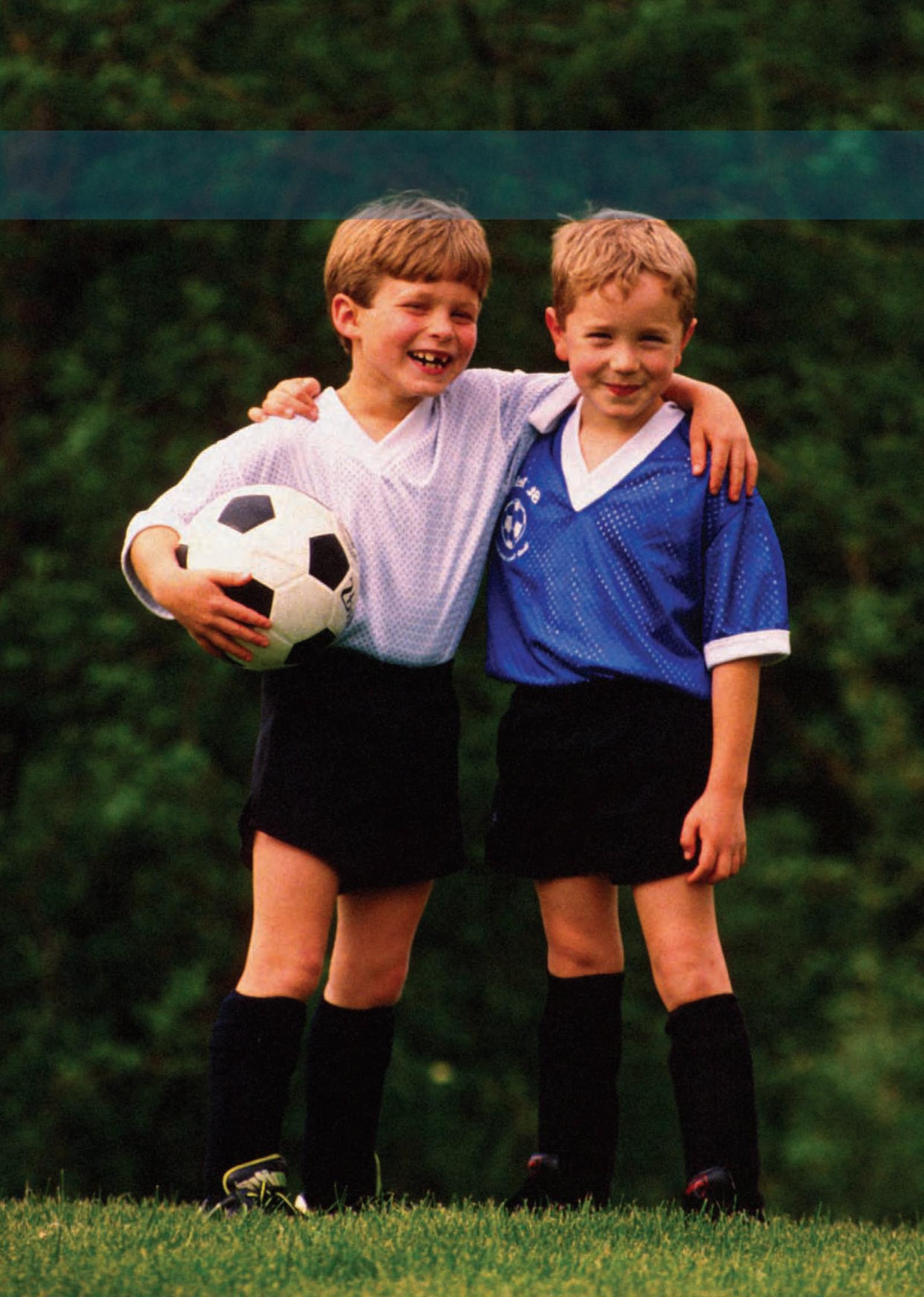
1. Structural sharing: this is an issue of the actual amount of contact and mixing that needs to take places between Protestants, Catholics and 'others' both within and between schools in terms of pupil balance, staff profile and board of governors
2. Procedural sharing: this is an issue of a common curriculum and the extent to which children and

young people from Catholic, Protestant and 'other' backgrounds are engaged in issues of diversity in a programme of work, as well as on a more informal basis, including the 'hidden curriculum' and extra curricular activity.

Underpinning the consideration and analysis of these two concepts is the issue of school ethos, and the extent to which schools of different types are considered 'fit for purpose'. That is to say, the report is concerned to examine the extent which a variety of schools types can be rendered compatible with the objectives of sharing. In certain respects this analysis runs counter to some commonly held views. As we have already seen, sharing is often cast as diametrically opposed to separation. This report will suggest that such a reductive means of thinking about sharing is both theoretically unsound and practically unhelpful.

Notes

- 1 Northern Ireland Office (1998) *The Agreement*, Belfast, Northern Ireland Office, 'Declaration of Support', section 5, p. 1.
- 2 The Northern Ireland Act 1998, article 75, subsection 2.
- 3 *The Agreement*, 'Strand One: Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland', section 34, p. 9.
- 4 Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) (2005) *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*, Belfast, OFMDFM, p. 7.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 39.
- 7 OFMDFM (2006), *A Shared Future: First Triennial Action Plan 2006-2009*, Belfast, OFMDFM.
- 8 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons Official Report, Northern Ireland Grand Committee, 17 June 2004, Norwich, The Stationery Office.
- 9 Northern Ireland Assembly debate, 4 June 2007, Available from <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2007/070604.htm#7>
- 10 Deloitte (2007), *Research into the Financial Costs of the Northern Ireland Divide*, Belfast, Deloitte.
- 11 Department of Education (2007) *A Consultation on Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools* p. 5. Available from <http://www.deni.gov.uk/sustainableschools-3.pdf>
- 12 Department of Education (2006) *Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing: Independent Strategic Review of Education*, Bangor, Department of Education, p. 159.
- 13 *ibid.*, p. 165.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 158.
- 15 *ibid.*, p. xxxviii. The Review recommended that in the planning of the schools' estate, the relevant authority 'should be required to maximise opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools'.
- 16 Sen, A. (2006) *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, London, Allen Lane, pp. 23-4.
- 17 European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), article 14, article 2 of the first protocol.
- 18 Barry, B. (2001), *Culture and Equality*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 207.
- 19 Appiah, K. (1994) Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction' in A. Gutmann (ed), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp.160-63.
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- 21 Habermas, J. (1994) 'Struggles for Recognition' in A. Gutmann (ed), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.130.
- 22 *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, 'Chairman's Foreword', p. xiv.
- 23 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) article 29 (1).
- 24 United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) *General Comment No. 1: The Aims of Education*, UN/CRC/GC/2001/1, Geneva, CRC.
- 25 Allport, G. (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley)
- 26 Hayes, B. C. I. McAllister and L. Dowds (2006) *Those Who Dared to be Different: Integrated Education in Northern Ireland*. Available from <http://polsc.anu.edu.au/staff/mcallister/research.htm>
- 27 Sisk, T. (1996) *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace, pp. 13-4.
- 28 The Runnymede Trust (2000) *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*. London: Profile Books Ltd.p. 44; O'Leary, B. (2005) 'Debating Consociational Politics: Normative and Explanatory Arguments', in S. Noel, ed. *From Power Sharing to Democracy: Post-conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies*. London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, Lijphart, A. (1977) *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press.
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- 30 Reich, R. (2005) 'Multicultural Accommodations in Education', in K. McDonough, and W. Feinberg, eds. *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies: Teaching for Cosmopolitan Values and Collective Identities*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 299.
- 31 Dawkins, R. (2001) 'No Faith in the Absurd', *Times Educational Supplement*, 23 February, p. 17; cited in Short, G. (2002) 'Faith-Based Schools: A Threat to Cohesion?', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 36 (4), p. 562.
- 32 Cairns, E., S. Dunn, and M. Giles (1993) 'Surveys of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland: A Review', in R. Osborne, R. Cormack and A. Gallagher (eds), *After the Reforms: Education and Policy in Northern Ireland*, Aldershot, Avebury, cited in Dunn, S. (2000), 'Northern Ireland: Education in a Divided Society' in D. Phillips (ed), *The Education Systems of the United Kingdom*, Oxford, Symposium Books, p. 89.
- 33 Short 'Faith-Based Schools', p. 563.
- 34 *ibid.*, p. 563. As evidence for this last claim, Short cites McNichol, U. (1988) 'Teaching Controversial Issues in a Controversial Society' in B. Carrington and B. Troyna (eds) *Children and Controversial Issues*, Lewes, The Falmer Press, pp. 111, 114. See also, Donaldson, A. (2001) 'Perceptions of Catholic Education', in A. Donaldson, D. McKeown and G. McCann (eds.) *Ethos and Education: Contemporary Issues in Catholic Education*, Belfast, St Mary's University College, p. 37
- 35 Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, p. 261.
- 36 *ibid.*, p. 262.
- 37 Short, 'Faith-Based Schools', p. 568; see also Cook, S.W. (1978), 'Interpersonal and Attitudinal Outcomes in Cooperating interracial Groups', *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 12 (1), p. 97.
- 38 *ibid.*



Northern Ireland

Background and methodology

A central task of this project was to initiate discussions on the subject of shared education among the representatives of local schools, other education providers, regional key stakeholders and elected politicians. The aim was to generate data that would enable an assessment to be made of attitudes towards increased cross-community sharing within schools and cross-sector collaboration between schools of different types in Northern Ireland. To achieve this outcome, round table discussions were hosted in two areas – Omagh and Coleraine – with local schools, other education providers and regional key stakeholders attending. Omagh and Coleraine were determined to be suitable geographical locations for the purposes of the project on the basis of having met 5 essential criteria:

1. They both have relatively mixed populations (see Figures 1 & 2)
2. They typify much of Northern Ireland in that they both have large towns with a recognised rural hinterland (see Figures 3 & 4)
3. They both have primary and post-primary schools representing a variety of school types, including Controlled, Voluntary, Maintained, Integrated, Irish Medium, Co-educational and single-sex, and Grammar (see Figures 3 & 4)
4. The schools are in a variety of sizes (see Figures 3 & 4)
5. There is a general demographic decline in both, which means that some rationalisation of schools is likely to occur in the coming years (see Figures 5 & 6).

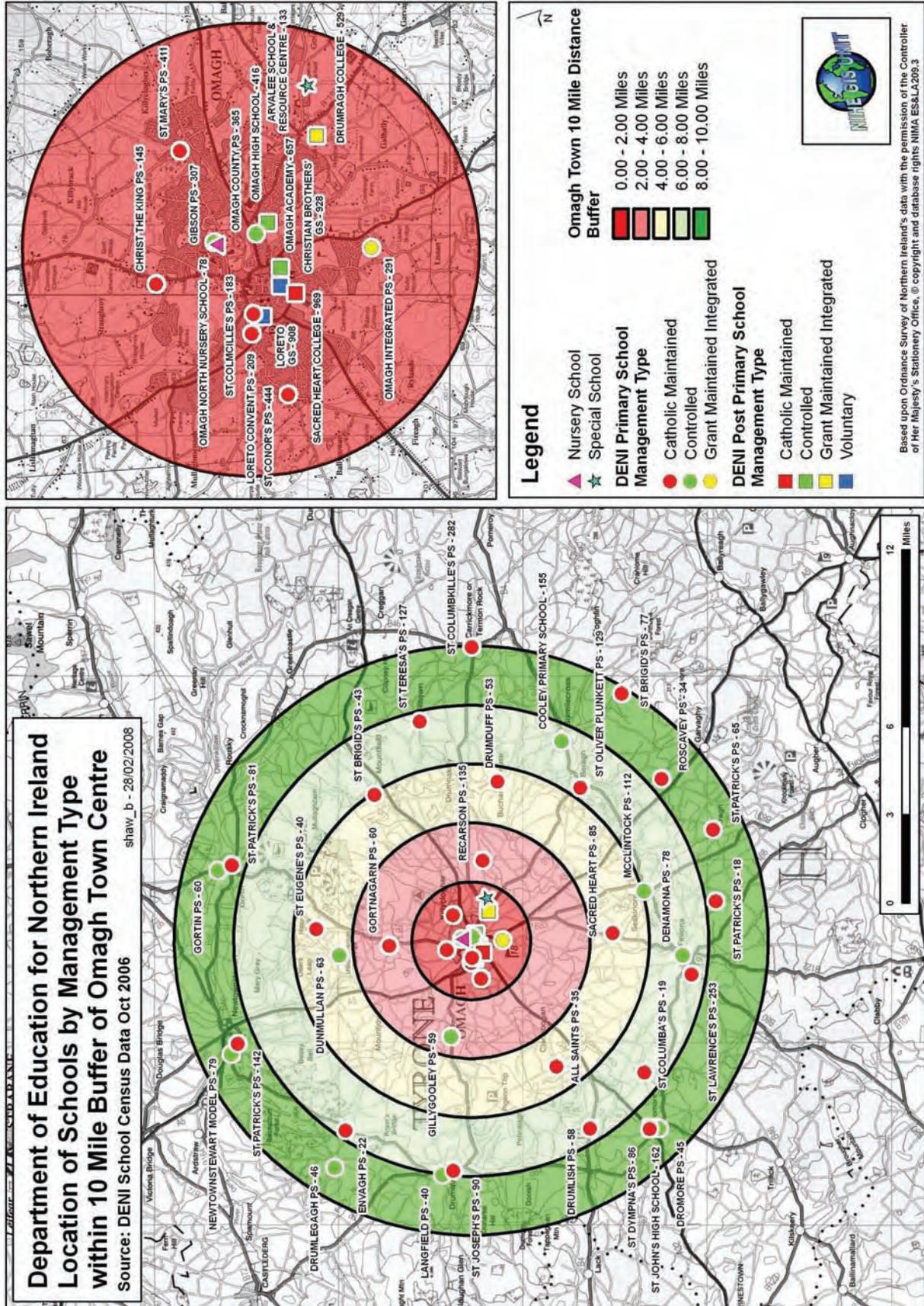
Figure 1: Omagh demographics (Local Government District)¹

Religion	(N=47,952)
Catholic	65.1%
Protestant	23.2%
Other Christian	3.1%
Other/non-Christian	0.2%
No religion/undeclared	8.4%

Figure 2: Coleraine demographics (Local Government District)²

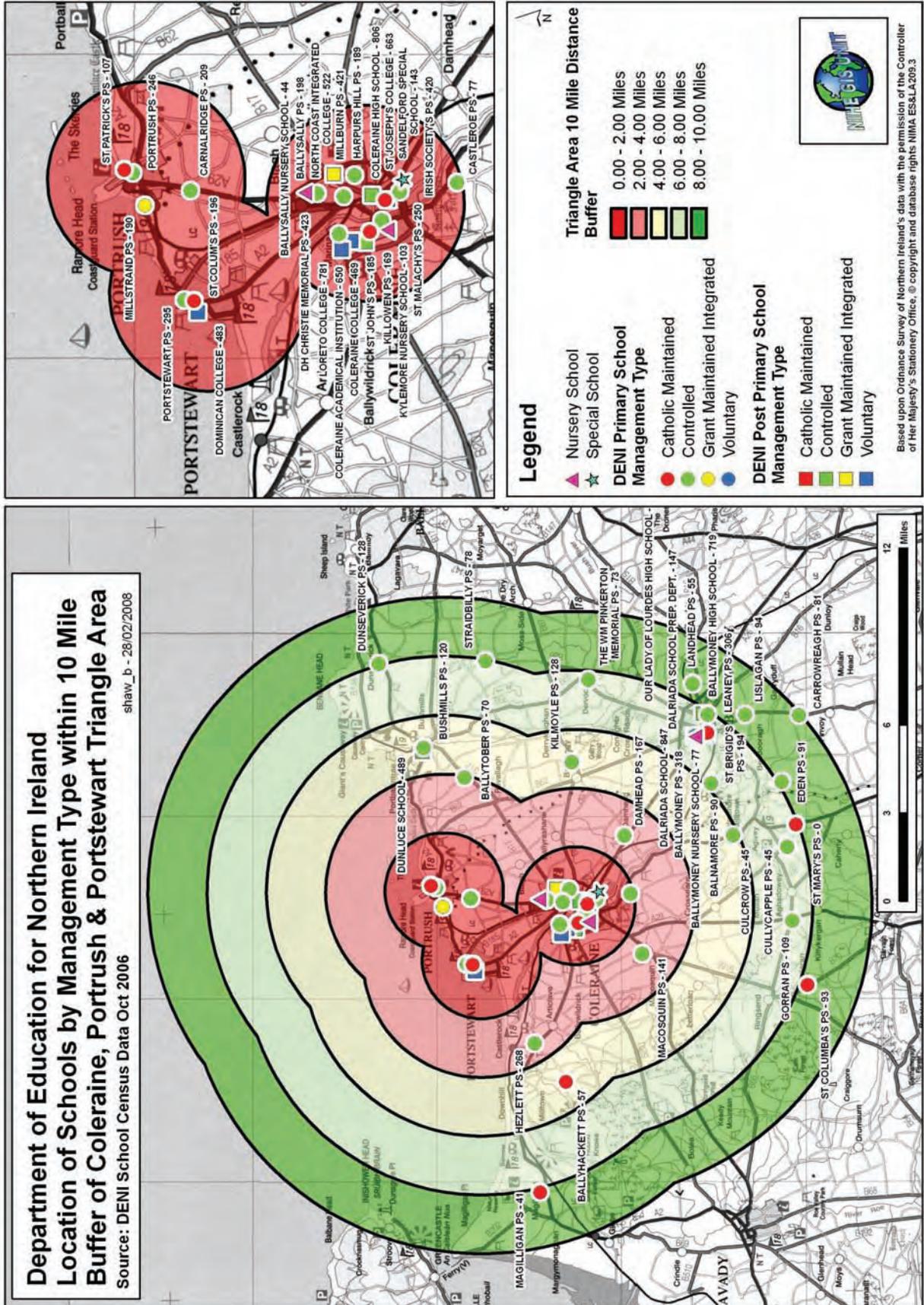
Religion	(N=56,315)
Catholic	24.1%
Protestant	54.4%
Other Christian	6.1%
Other/non-Christian	0.3%
No religion/undeclared	15.1%

Figure 3: Schools in the Omagh area³



Produced with the kind assistance of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive GIS Mapping Unit.

Figure 4: Schools in the Coleraine area



Produced with the kind assistance of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive GIS Mapping Unit.

Figure 5: Omagh school enrolments pattern⁴

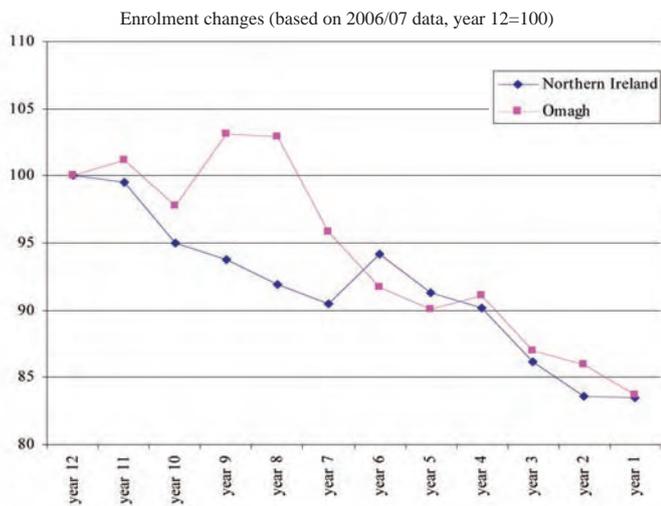
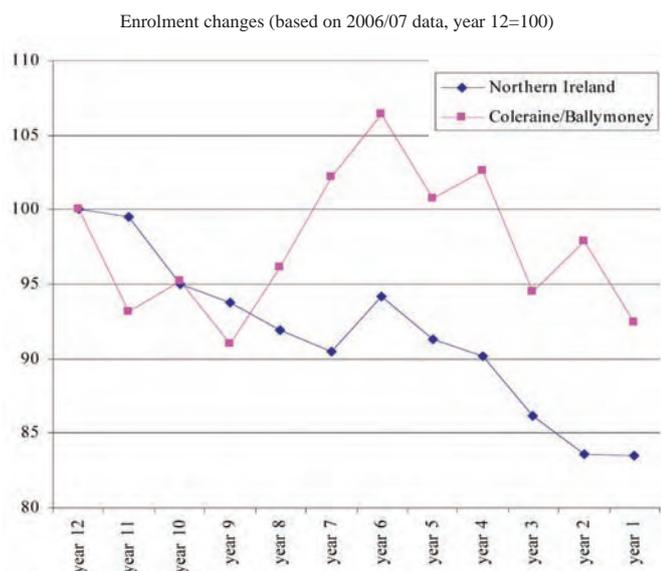


Figure 6: Coleraine school enrolments pattern⁵



In Omagh 10 post-primary providers (7 schools plus a special school, a business college and a further education college) were invited to attend the roundtable:

1. Arvalee School (special school)
2. Dean Maguirc College
3. Drumragh Integrated College
4. St John's Business College
5. Sacred Heart College
6. Omagh High School
7. Christians Brothers Grammar School
8. Loreto Grammar School
9. Omagh Academy
10. South West Regional College (Further Education College)

In Coleraine 12 schools were invited to attend the roundtable:⁶

1. Dalriada School
2. Coleraine High School
3. St Joseph's College
4. North Coast Integrated College
5. Coleraine Academical Institution
6. Ballymoney High School
7. Garvagh High School⁷
8. Coleraine College
9. Dunluce School
10. Loreto College
11. Dominican College
12. Our Lady of St Lourdes High School

In addition to the participating schools 7 key stakeholders were invited to attend both the Omagh and Coleraine events:

1. Department of Education
2. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
3. Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
4. North Eastern Education and Library Board
5. Western Education and Library Board
6. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
7. Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta

21 of the 22 schools and other post-primary education providers invited subsequently took part. All 7 of the regional key stakeholders were represented. In total 61 people were involved in the two events, 43 of whom participated in the discussions, including Principals, Vice Principals and the Chairs of school Boards of Governors. The proceedings were hosted in suitably neutral venues and recorded by audio and note-taking.⁸ At the end of the discussions participants were asked to complete a confidential questionnaire registering their opinions on a

number of options for the future of schools. 38 questionnaires were returned, providing attitudinal information on 5 substantive issues (see Figure 7 and for a full copy of the questionnaire see Appendix A).

Figure 7: Content of project questionnaire

- 1. Types of Schools:** the variety of schools that might be developed to deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum.
- 2. Relations between schools:** the extent to which (and the ways in which) schools should collaborate with each other.
- 3. Denominational collaboration:** how different religious traditions can work together in managing schools.
- 4. Educational partnerships:** the extent to which collaborative arrangements should promote the mixing of pupils from different schools and communities.
- 5. Age-grouping for schools:** the organisation of schools in relation to the age of the pupils that they enrol.

To supplement the discussions that took place in Omagh and Coleraine, 17 semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with senior representatives from all 17 identified regional key stakeholders and political parties:

1. Department of Education
2. Education and Skills Authority
3. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
4. Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
5. Trustees of the Catholic Church
6. Transferors Representative Council (Anglican)
7. Transferors Representative Council (Presbyterian)
8. Transferors Representative Council (Methodist)
9. Western Education and Library Board
10. North Eastern Education and Library Board
11. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
12. Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta
13. Sinn Féin
14. Democratic Unionist Party
15. Ulster Unionist Party
16. Social Democratic and Labour Party
17. Alliance Party

The completed interviews were transcribed and their contents analysed for any references made to the 5 substantive issues contained within the questionnaires. In addition, discussions of government policy initiatives were highlighted, with particular attention paid to the Report of

the *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, proposals for area-based planning of the schools' estate, proposals for a sustainable schools policy, the Pupil Entitlement Framework and the programme for citizenship education introduced under the *Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006*.⁹

Finally, in order to further assist the project and increase the validity of any assessment made or conclusions reached, a secondary analysis was undertaken of the findings of a public consultation experiment or 'Deliberative Poll' conducted in January 2007, in which a random but representative sample of parents from Omagh discussed and registered opinions on a number of options for the future of schools in their local area.¹⁰ This consultation engaged 565 participants in its initial stages, 121 of whom completed the exercise. The table below (Figure 8) shows the percentage of parents who had at least one child in school according to type (for a full set of categorical variables and demographics see Appendix B).

Figure 8: Percentage of parents (Omagh) with children in schools according to type

School type	Participants with at least one child in a school type (N=121)
Catholic primary	31.4%
Controlled primary	19.0%
Integrated primary	3.3%
Special primary	1.7%
Irish-medium primary	0.8%
Controlled post-primary	14.0%
Catholic post-primary	37.2%
Controlled grammar	11.6%
Catholic grammar	19.0%
Integrated post-primary	11.6%
Irish-medium post-primary	0.0%
Special post-primary	0.8%

Many of the questions answered by those who took part in the 2007 consultation were replicated in the roundtables. Accordingly, the analysis which follows compares and contrasts attitudes and opinions of the representatives of the local schools, other education providers and regional key stakeholders with those of parents. The findings are supplemented with data from the semi-structured interviews, the audio recordings and notes taken during the roundtables with the addition of some qualitative information gathered from the questionnaires.

Attitudes to sharing

The education system in Northern Ireland has been structured almost entirely on the principle of school autonomy, and its preservation. What is far from clear, however, is whether, or in which respects, the idea of increased cross-community sharing within schools and cross-sector collaboration between schools of different types marks a departure from that principle. None of the interviewees for this project were openly opposed to shared education, although, as one might expect, some were more cautious than others. The interview transcriptions revealed five general themes or issues that are particularly relevant to the analysis which follows:

1. A significant number of the interviewees argued that sharing should not be compulsory or 'imposed', since that would amount to 'social engineering'. But there are two points that need to be made at the outset and in response to arguments of this sort. First, it is important to note that social engineering is neither good nor bad in itself – any education policy (including the option of maintaining the status quo) can be described as such. Second, when discussing the purpose of education the decisive factor is always that of deciding which purpose or purposes education is meant to serve. Only once this question has been answered can we decide whether 'social engineering' is desirable or not.
2. All of the interviewees recognised and accepted the economic case for greater sharing in education. One Unionist politician went so far as to argue that 'the only real thing that brings people together is economic necessity'. Although the economic case as such was not in question, a number of interviewees expressed the view that economic issues should not be separated from equality issues. The concern for equality in educational provision is bound up it seems with a broader concern for equality between the two main communities. One implication of the view that economic issues should not be separated from equality issues is that rationalisation may, as a consequence, tend to occur within schools, or school sectors, rather than across them. This, in turn, could lead to a more efficient use of funds. But it may do little to advance sharing within schools and collaboration across sectors.¹¹
3. Some of the interviewees argued that, although education reform may be a necessary condition of a shared future, it was not a sufficient condition. In other words, they argued that building a shared future that is inclusive of everyone in Northern Ireland would involve more than reforming the education system. For example, a representative of Catholic education argued that, 'we clearly have to share this piece of land, whatever the political arrangements are, a shared future cannot but be a good thing. ... I think we have to emphasise a shared future wherever possible, but to focus only on education as an area, well I think that there are other important aspects'. It is possible that the concern here is not just that schools might be made to carry an undue social burden, but that the various sectors could be forced or compelled to share or collaborate against their wishes.
4. In the main, the interviewees expressed a view that ordinary people should be involved in decisions about any changes to the education system – a view that supports the idea of 'area-based planning' and the enabling of 'parental voice' more generally. One Nationalist politician expressed the hope that, 'if discussions and dialogue and communication takes place beforehand agreement [within a particular area could] be reached on what is the most effective way forward'. Some interviewees did express concerns, however, about area-based planning. In particular, they expressed the concern that local issues needed to be seen as part of a broader debate on the future direction of the education system as a whole.
5. Finally, some interviewees argued that there was a need for an agreed strategic framework for sharing, and that this along with the recommendations of the *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, should be implemented forthwith. On this issue, a representative of integrated education made two points that are of considerable importance. First, the interviewee asked 'How do you test for sharing?' Second, the interviewee pointed out that what was needed was not just sharing per se, but 'quality sharing'. This latter comment was driven by a concern 'that sometimes contact can actually have destructive outcomes.' Specifically, there was a worry that bringing young Protestants and Catholics together in a non-managed and ill-prepared setting would do little to challenge negative stereotypes, and that in fact, it might serve to reinforce prejudice.

The interviewees held different and sometimes competing views as to how changes in education should proceed. This forces us to consider how sharing should therefore be understood as a concept, and how that understanding might play out in practice so that it works for the good of everyone in society. In what follows, quantitative and qualitative data is used to explain why some structural and procedural options for sharing might be preferred over certain others.

Types of schools

All schools that currently receive government funding in Northern Ireland are required to deliver the statutory minimum content of the common curriculum (see Figure 9). In particular, they must provide opportunities in relation to a number of specified Areas of Learning and, in addition, provide for Religious Education that is in accordance with a core syllabus drafted by the four main Christian Churches and specified by the Department of Education.¹² The Areas of Learning and Religious Education are said to be consistent with a balanced and broadly based syllabus which: (a) promotes the spiritual, emotional, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils at the school and thereby of society; and (b) prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life by equipping them with appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills.¹³

In addition to the minimum content requirements of the curriculum, schools are also subject to the requirement of the Pupil Entitlement Framework. Specifically, post-primary schools will in future be expected to provide all pupils, aged 14 and above, with a wider range of learning opportunities suited to their individual needs, aptitudes and interests. Schools will be required to offer a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 (current target 24) and a minimum number of courses at post-16 (current target 27).¹⁵ In both instances at least one-third of the courses on offer must be general (academic) and at least one-third applied (vocational/professional/technical). The remaining one-third of courses offered will be left to the discretion of each school.

Figure 9: The Northern Ireland curriculum¹⁴

Key stage	Foundation	1&2	3	4
Age of pupils	3-5	5-7 and 7-11	11-14	14-16
Year group	Pre-school	1-2 and 3-6	7-9	10-11
Religious Education	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language and Literacy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mathematics and Numeracy	✓	✓	✓	✓
The World Around Us	✓	✓		
Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (including Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community at Key stages 1&2 and Local and Global Citizenship at Key stages 3&4)		✓	✓	✓
Modern Languages			✓	✓
The Arts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Environment and Society			✓	✓
Science and Technology			✓	✓
Learning for Life and Work			✓	✓
Physical Development and Movement	✓	✓		
Physical Education			✓	✓

Following discussions, the participants (representatives and parents, respectively) of this project were asked if they would support, oppose, or, neither oppose nor support the following choices for the type of schools that might deliver the curriculum:

1. Having both academic and technical/vocational schools
2. Having a system of specialist schools, each developing at least one area of expertise, like language, science, or technology
3. Having a system of all-ability schools, all providing the same wide curriculum.

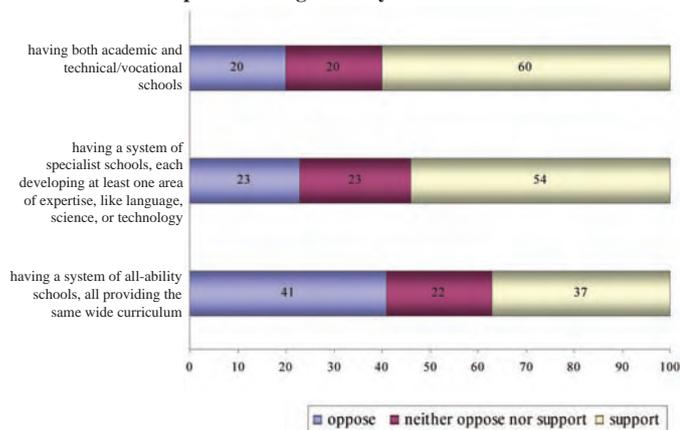
significantly less than for the previous option. While there may not therefore be any substantial opposition to specialist schools, there was, nonetheless, a diversity of opinions among participants with notable minorities of both the representatives (23%) and parents (26.7%) indicating they would neither oppose nor support the option.

The two groups held generally opposing views on the question of having a system of all-ability schools, all providing the same wide curriculum. The representatives were divided among themselves, with the largest number of participants (41%) opposed to the option and a substantial minority (37%) indicating their support. By contrast, a majority of parents (65.2%) were supportive.

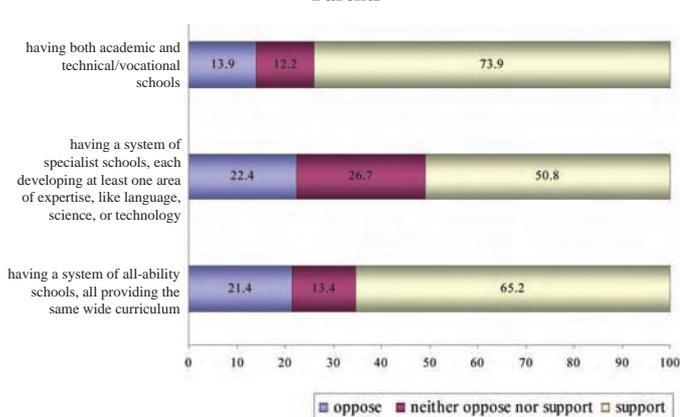
In terms of interpreting these findings, important insights can be gained from the interviews:

1. A number of interviewees were of the view that it is not so much the type of school that matters but the outcomes schools deliver. As a representative of Catholic education put it: ‘There is a whole range of options, but I think we’re looking at delivering the goods in terms of pupil entitlement, in terms of social cohesion, in terms of local self-confidence’. This comment chimes with our claim above that the real test of any education system is whether it satisfies certain normative goals (i.e., what the system ought to deliver, given the particular circumstances in which that system has to operate).
2. Some interviewees stressed that decisions about types of schools would need to be driven not just by outcomes, but also by economic realities. One key civil servant in the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister noted that ‘the exercise of choice is not without cost and therefore you need to factor that in’. Following a similar logic, a member of the Transferor Representative Council noted that ‘we just cannot sustain the number of small schools we have for the sake of the principles here’, suggesting that the principles to which many educationalists adhere may sometimes have to give way to pragmatic imperatives.
3. It was evident that the question of what types of schools are most likely to deliver sharing creates particular problems for the Irish-medium sector. Representatives of Irish-medium schools argue that children are most likely to learn the language if they are able to ‘immerse’ themselves in it. Ideally, this outcome would require separate Irish-medium schools. However, the representatives also argued that, although language learning works best in separate schools, those schools should be open to all comers, irrespective of their

Representatives of local schools/other education providers/regional key stakeholders



Parents



A majority of the representatives of local schools, other education providers and regional key stakeholders (60%) and of parents (73.9%) supported having both academic and technical/vocational schools.

The representatives (54%) and parents (50.8%) also supported having a system of specialist schools each developing at least one area of expertise, such as language, science or technology. The percentage figure was, however,

religious or communal background. In this sense, sharing could be achieved, notwithstanding the type of school involved and is, indeed, seen a desirable objective for Irish-medium education.

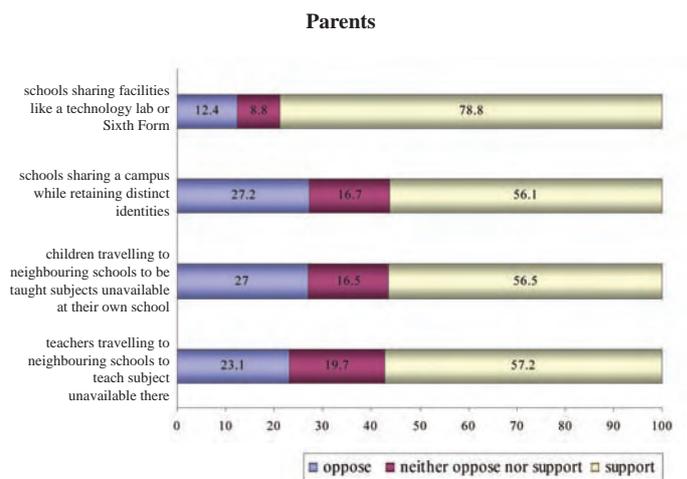
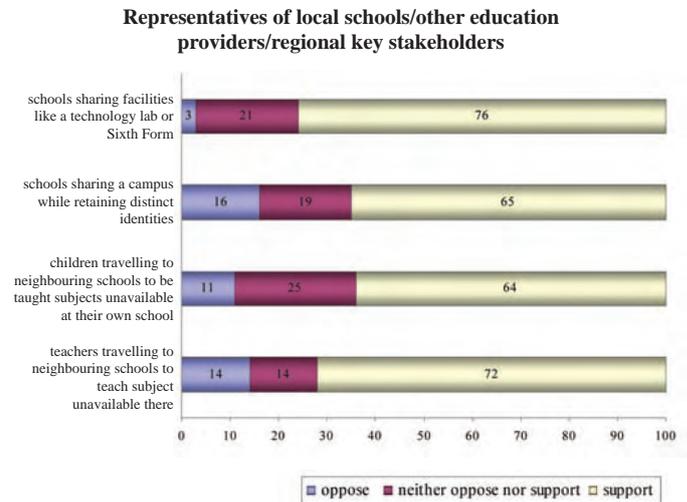
4. The question of having a system of all-ability schools, all providing the same wide curriculum, is a hotly disputed issue in Northern Ireland, linked as it is to the vexed issue of academic selection and post-primary transfer. Our results clearly suggest that parents and representatives take a different view on this matter. It appears that, for many parents, the single most important factor is whether their children will receive the best possible education. By contrast, the findings suggest that, for some representatives, a decisive factor is the ethos or environment in which education takes place which, in turn, leads them to question the concept of all-ability schools.

Relations between schools

As we noted above, the education system in Northern Ireland has been historically structured almost entirely on the principle of school autonomy, and its preservation, within a competitive framework. The *Independent Strategic Review of Education* maintained that this situation has, to a greater or lesser extent, cost children and young people in terms of their experiences. It has, we are told, reduced the opportunities afforded to teachers and principals, lead to an inefficient use of the schools' estate, impacted on economic well-being, and on the integration and health of society more generally. With this analysis in mind the Review suggested that in future collaboration should be central to ensuring sustainable local school provision. Specifically, it recommended that 'collaborative approaches to the sharing of facilities and resources should be standard practice, while ensuring that the particular identity or ethos of an individual school is preserved wherever possible.'¹⁶

Following discussions on the subject of relations between schools, the participants (representatives and parents, respectively) of this project were asked if they would support, oppose, or, neither oppose nor support the following choices:

1. Schools sharing facilities like a technology lab or Sixth Form.
2. Schools sharing a campus while retaining distinct identities.
3. Children travelling to neighbouring schools to be taught subjects unavailable at their own school.
4. Teachers travelling to neighbouring schools to teach subjects unavailable there.



The representatives of local schools, other education providers and regional key stakeholders and parents appeared to be generally in favour of schools collaborating with each other. A majority of representatives (76%) and of parents (78.8%) supported the idea of schools sharing facilities like a technology lab or Sixth Form. A majority of representatives (65%) and of parents (56.1%) also supported sharing a campus while retaining distinct identities. The percentages in this instance were, however, significantly reduced when compared to the previous option. And while there may not therefore be any substantial opposition to a shared campus approach, it is worth noting nonetheless the diversity of opinions registered.

Significantly, on the next two questions, not only was there a wide range of views, but perhaps more interestingly, there was evidence to suggest that parents were less convinced by the options under consideration than the representatives. Only a small majority of parents, for example, supported the idea of children travelling to neighbouring schools to be taught subjects unavailable at their own school (56.5%). By contrast, a sizeable majority of representatives supported this option (64%) as well as the option of teachers travelling to neighbouring schools (72%).

Overall, the results suggest a significant level of flexibility and a willingness to at least consider new ways of doing things that will strengthen the relations between schools. This conclusion is supported by the interview material:

1. One Nationalist politician, for example, expressed the idea that collaboration might be rendered compatible with the recognition and maintenance of diverse identities, and, when considering specifically the option of a shared campus, went as far as arguing that ‘there may be possibilities here for an over-all identity... which at the same time preserves the individual identity of schools’.
2. A representative from Catholic education, however, urged caution, and suggested that collaboration was not simply about the physical environment but would also depend for its success on a clear understanding of what recognition and sharing ought to involve: ‘putting buildings together is one thing, putting minds and hearts together is a different matter. And I don’t believe that we should have buildings together unless there are ground rules in place to make sure that collaboration is not just in exploiting accommodation’. As we have previously indicated, this cautionary note is a reflection of the fact that there is no agreement on what sharing means or how it might best be delivered in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the lack of consensus on sharing was even more apparent when, on the one hand, a spokesperson for integrated education maintained that it was necessary to develop ‘an indices of sharing or charter mark’. While, on the other hand, a senior civil servant at the Department of Education raised concern at the proposal: I don’t know that we should be exploring at speed issues around the charter mark or certainly if we are, we are going to have to have a much broader thinking of it’.
3. Many of our interviewees treated the issue of school collaboration in a very pragmatic way, not just in terms of the delivery of the curriculum, but also in terms of

the practicalities of having children and teachers travelling from one school to another. Once again, however, the underlying concern for ‘a high quality, pupil-centred education’ was seen as more important than the method by which it might be physically delivered. Interviewees stressed the relationship between economic realities and the need for collaboration. In this context, the representative of integrated education stated that, ‘it makes sense to have less schools and one way of doing this is to bring children together’.

4. Overall, it seems there is a willingness to collaborate, although there is also a fair degree of uncertainty and perhaps disagreement as to how to proceed. In response to this uncertainty, a senior civil servant at the Department of Education stressed the need for greater levels of deliberation and the greater examination of possible models, ‘that more examples of sharing and collaboration best practice needs to be disseminated’.

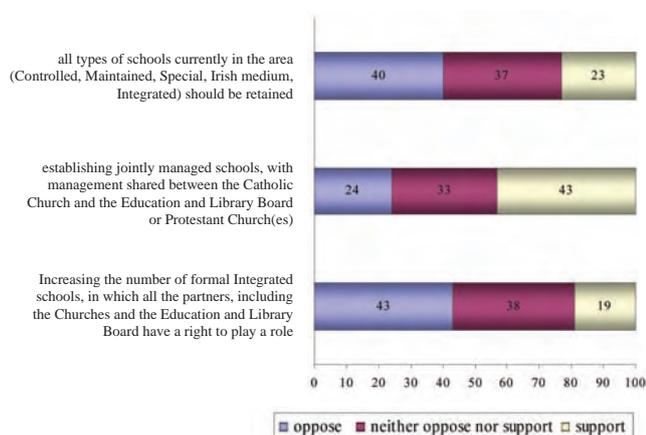
Denominational collaboration

To a greater or lesser extent schools in Northern Ireland are characterised by active involvement of the main Christian churches in their management structure. Representatives of the Catholic church sit on the Boards of Governors of Catholic schools, while the main Protestant churches are represented on the Boards of Governors of Controlled schools. Other types of schools normally do not have any statutory representation of the churches on their Boards of Governors. Integrated schools, Special schools and Irish Medium schools, for example, do not have any particular relationship with specific religious denominations.

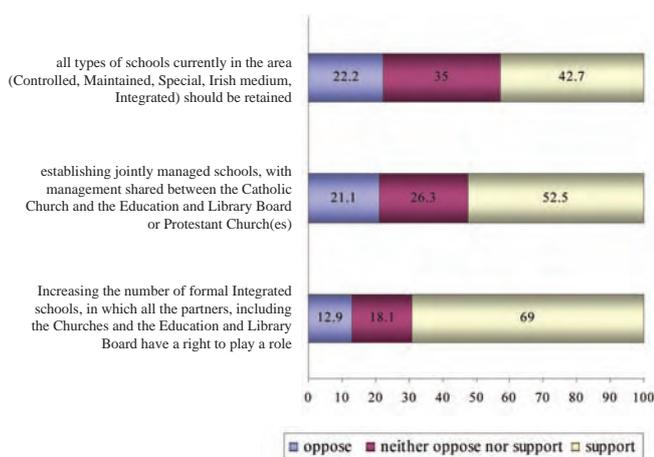
Participants (representatives and parents, respectively) of this project were asked to reflect upon the current situation in terms of denominational collaboration and then to indicate if they would support, oppose, or neither oppose nor support the following policy choices:

1. All types of schools currently in the Omagh and Coleraine areas (Controlled, Maintained, Special, Irish medium, Integrated) should be retained
2. Establishing jointly managed schools, with management shared between the Catholic Church and the local Education and Library Board or Protestant church(es)
3. Increasing the number of formal integrated schools, in which all the partners, including the Churches and the Education and Library Board, have a right to play a role.

Representatives of local schools/other education providers/regional key stakeholders



Parents



Our findings show that there is only minority support among both representatives (23%) and parents (42.7%) for retaining the status quo. Curiously, however, the results for 'establishing jointly managed schools' are also unconvincing. In this instance, only a small majority (52.5%) of parents indicated their support, while the majority of representatives were either opposed (24%) or neither opposed nor supported (33%) the option. Since a substantive minority of representatives (43%) also stated that they were opposed to increasing the number of formal Integrated schools, it is not clear from our data what their preferred option would be, given that they do not support retaining the status quo.

The most striking figure in this set of questions is the percentage of parents (69%) in favour of increasing the number of formally Integrated schools, a result that is very much at odds with the percentage of representatives (19%)

choosing this option. But perhaps this finding is not so surprising once we recognise that the respective interests of parents and representatives may point in very different directions. It could be that parents do not have the same vested interests as some of the representatives have in retaining control of individual schools. This is not to suggest any moral judgement on our part, it is merely a reflection of commonly held views and a plausible assumption. Ultimately, it is difficult in the absence of a sustained and genuine dialogue between parents and representatives, to be sure why there is such a difference in opinions.

Once again, the interview materials cast some light on these results:

1. As we have noted on a number of occasions, all of our interviewees recognised the need for change in response to the downturn in pupil numbers; they also accepted the economic case for rationalisation. In other words, they recognised that maintaining the status quo is not a viable option. As we have also noted, however, there is a considerable degree of uncertainty over what exactly sharing ought to look like. Yet while there is uncertainty, practical necessity may nevertheless compel people to arrive at a workable solution. Hence, in such a pragmatic vein, a representative of Catholic education suggested that 'there are clearly rural areas where there is ... a balanced population, but also declining populations, where we could get the rudiments of a jointly managed school'.
2. While recognising the need for change, some representatives were concerned that change should not adversely affect the 'ethos' of their schools. As a senior figure in the Catholic church argued that there should be 'room in secular society for faith-based education. ... But there's no question of having a principled opposition to finding shared ways forward. I think we are also saying we want to be able to ensure that the option of faith-based education ... is available to those who wish to have it'.
3. Despite paying lip service to the idea of shared education, some interviewees suggested that change was not their primary responsibility and that it would be much better and desirable if this were to happen somewhere else – not within their schools, but rather, within or across some other sectors. To implement this recommendation would, of course, amount to a move away from the status quo; but what is not so clear is how it would meet the challenges of a shared future and fulfil the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education.

4. There is considerable uncertainty, and even some degree of fear, surrounding sharing. A member of the Transferors Representative Council expressed this graphically: 'I am coming from a position where I believe children should be educated together in some kind of context, but we are living in Northern Ireland... [there is] geographical segregation, there is also the mind-set segregation, which brings in issues about theological outlook, political outlook, even dealing with the past and what has happened.' On being specifically asked about jointly managed schools, this interviewee went on to say that it could be possible to find a solution. This we take to be an extremely positive indication of the fact that, even when faced with difficulties, those committed to a shared future will seek to find ways of promoting the agenda.
5. Some of Trustees and Transferors we interviewed indicated that representatives of both the Catholic and Protestant churches had together visited a jointly managed school in Liverpool and continue to dialogue on the issue. However, while one interviewee claimed that this was a fascinating experience (which 'would work in Northern Ireland'), another claimed that it was not possible to replicate the same experiment, simply because the context is so different. It is not clear to us how the latter interviewee could know this for certain in the absence of actually trying.
6. When asked about jointly managed schools a senior representative of a Protestant church, who took part in the Liverpool visit, said: 'I know why they want to maintain Catholic/school/parish triangle and control ethos. I can understand that, but I would hope that someone like [name deleted]... could see from the Liverpool experience that the ethos of the Catholic church in those schools is equally Catholic without losing out... I think that we can persuade them that it is possible to educate their children in Catholic parameters and in a jointly managed way.' A senior representative of the Catholic church said: 'We can also create our [own] local solutions rather than just saying what works in Paisley in Scotland and therefore import that over here, what works in C of E and RC schools in Liverpool. We can find our [own] solutions that take people seriously where they are and enhances their dignity their cultural self-respect.' The interviewee added that failure to seriously engage with the issue would run the risk of creating a circumstance in which 'the politicians will take all the credit for the present and the churches will get all the blame for the past.'
7. From the data collected for this project, it appears that the problem with creating jointly managed schools in Northern Ireland may be as much practical as anything else. For example, one member of the Transferors Representative Council asked: 'Who's going to own the buildings? How would you manage the school in a joint way? How do you deliver the RE in a way that satisfies everyone who has a stake?' As this report will show, such concerns, while valid, are not insurmountable. In particular, evidence from the examination of shared campus schools in North Lanarkshire, Scotland, indicates that many structural and procedural difficulties can be successfully resolved through dialogue and willingness to innovate.

Cross-community sharing

Social attitudes surveys and public opinion polls have consistently shown that a majority of people in Northern Ireland would like to send their children to, or to see an increase in the number of, mixed-religion or formally integrated schools.¹⁷ Despite this consistent level of support few schools actually have a significant mix of the two main religious groups. In 2007, 295,282 (89.9%) children and young people enrolled in the education system were nominally designated as Protestant or Catholic. Only 8,185 (4.9%) pupils attending a Controlled school were Catholic and only 1,195 (1%) pupils attending a Catholic maintain/other maintained school were Protestant (see Figure 10). 56 (4.4%) schools, educating 18,017 (5.5%) pupils, were recognised as having formal integrated status. From a total of 542, only 14 (2.6%) Catholic maintained/other maintained schools had 10 percent or more Protestant pupils enrolled. And from a total of 604, only 86 (14.2%) Controlled schools had 10 percent or more Catholics enrolled (see Figures 11 & 12).

Figure 10: Number of schools in Northern Ireland in 2007¹⁸

	Special	Nursery	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Controlled schools	42	66	414	82	604
Catholic maintained/other maintained	3	33	431	75	542
Integrated schools	0	0	37	19	56
Schools under other management	0	0	14	52	66
Total	45	99	896	228	1,268

Figure 11: Number of pupils by religion in different types of school in Northern Ireland in 2007¹⁹

	Catholic	Protestant	Christian/others	Total
Controlled schools	8,185	105,795	23,457	137,437
Catholic maintained/other maintained	121,000	1,195	1,350	123,545
Integrated schools	7,117	7,575	3,325	18,017
Schools under other management	29,261	15,154	5,146	49,561
Total	165,563	129,719	33,278	328,560

Figure 12: Number of schools in Northern Ireland by management type that have more than 10% of the minority community (defined as Protestant or Catholic) enrolled in 2007²⁰

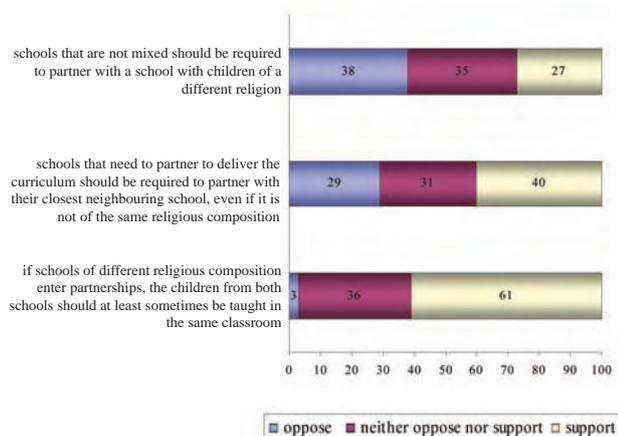
	Special needs	Nursery	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Controlled schools	39	19	22	6	86
Catholic maintained/other maintained	1	4	8	1	14
Integrated schools	0	0	35	17	52
Schools under other management	0	0	6	9	15
Total	40	23	71	33	167

The report of the *Independent Strategic Review of Education* notes that ‘all schools, and all the educational interests, need to, and wish to, play their part in the journey towards the goal of a shared future’.²¹ Accordingly, it has been recommended that the Department of Education make clear that, in discharging its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education, it is committed to facilitating and encouraging an inclusive strategy with a variety of meaningful approaches. This project sought to find out if the representatives of local schools, other education providers and regional key stakeholders and parents would support an increase in cross-community sharing taking place within schools.

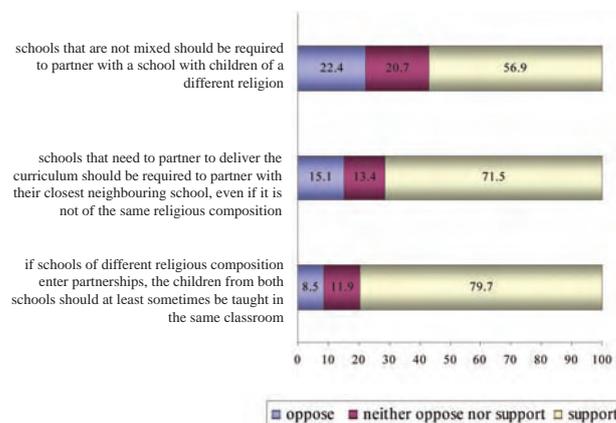
Representatives and parents were asked if they agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed with the following statements:

1. Schools that are not mixed should be required to partner with a school with children of a different religion.
2. Schools that need to partner to deliver the curriculum should be required to partner with their closest neighbouring school, even if it is not of the same religious composition.
3. If schools of different religious composition enter partnerships, the children from both schools should at least sometimes be taught in the same classroom.

Representatives of local schools/other education providers/regional key stakeholders



Parents



A majority of parents (56.9%) agreed with the statement that ‘schools that are not mixed should be required to partner with a school with children of a different religion’. An even greater majority (71.5%) agreed with the statement that ‘schools that need to partner to deliver the curriculum should be required to partner with their closest neighbouring school, even if it is not of the same religious composition’, while an even greater majority still (79.7%) agreed with the statement that ‘if schools of different religious composition enter partnerships, the children from both schools should at least sometimes be taught in the same classroom’.

There are two ways in which these results might be interpreted (although the two are not mutually exclusive). First, reflecting on the concept of what cross-community sharing would mean for partnerships, the parents supported the idea that this should involve children from different schools being educated together in the same classroom. Secondly, reflecting concerns about academic attainment, the parents supported the idea that sharing should have a practical benefit. But however the results are interpreted, it is clear that they are somewhat divergent from the views of the representatives.

A small minority of representatives agreed (27%) with the statement ‘schools that are not mixed should be required to partner with a school of a different religion’. A larger minority of representatives (40%) agreed with the statement that ‘schools that need to partner to deliver the curriculum should be required to partner with their closest neighbouring school, even if it is not of the same religious composition’. A majority of representatives (61%) agreed with the statement that ‘if schools of different religious composition enter partnerships, the children from both schools should at least sometimes be taught in the same classroom’.

We have already highlighted a number of issues that may explain why the representatives were less than enthusiastic about the options that were put to them. Some of the representatives interviewed maintained that mixed-religion schools should not be compulsory. They argued that enforced cross-community sharing or cross-sector collaboration would amount to a form of ‘social engineering’, which may help explain why such a small minority (27%) agreed with the statement ‘schools that are not mixed should be required to partner with a school of a different religion’.

1. Minority support for the statement ‘schools that need to partner to deliver the curriculum should be required to partner with their closest neighbouring school, even if it is not of the same religious composition’ can also be explained in terms of ‘social engineering’. But, as indicated above, it can also be explained in terms of legitimate concerns over preserving the religious ‘ethos’ of different types of schools. One interviewee put the matter directly, arguing that ‘the Catholic sector especially feel that they don’t want to lose that sense of control of what they call the ethos, the Catholic ethos of their schools.’
2. On a similar vein, representatives of the Protestant churches argued that they were being marginalised by the Department of Education in discussions over the future of schools. One Transferor in particular argued: ‘We’re frustrated... when we meet with folks ... from the [Catholic] maintained sector, they can speak for the [Catholic] maintained sector; whereas we as Transferors feel we can’t really speak for the Controlled sector... we can just give a partial input into it and we don’t have the authority to take decisions for the controlled sector’. Issues of this sort raise unsettling questions of (communal) equality or ‘parity of esteem’, as it is known under the terms of the Belfast Agreement. It appears self-evident that any discussions on the future of education must first reassure everyone involved that they have been duly recognised and respected, before moving on to a discussion of structural and procedural changes. Dialogue premised upon asymmetrical relations is less likely to produce results that support sharing.

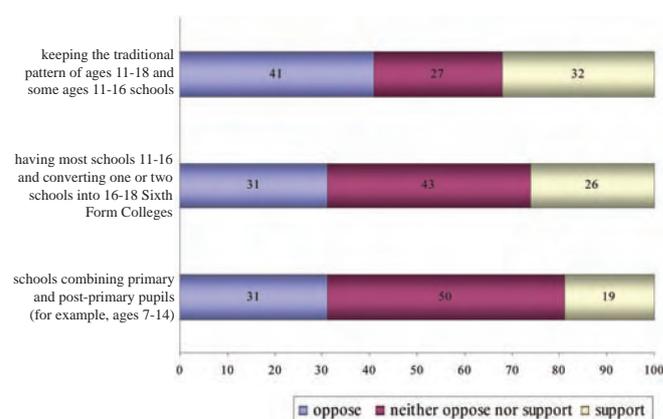
Age-grouping for schools

Most primary schools in Northern Ireland take pupils aged 4-11 and most post-primary schools either take pupils aged 11-16 years, or pupils aged 11-18 years. There has been much discussion, in the context of the post-primary review of education, the introduction of the *Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006* and the proposed ending of academic selection at aged eleven, as to what the appropriate age-grouping for children within a school ought to be.

This project sought to find out what representatives and parents thought about the issue of age-grouping linking it to the broader discussion of cross-community sharing and cross-sector collaboration. Accordingly, participants were asked if they would support, oppose, or neither oppose nor support the following policy choices for schools:

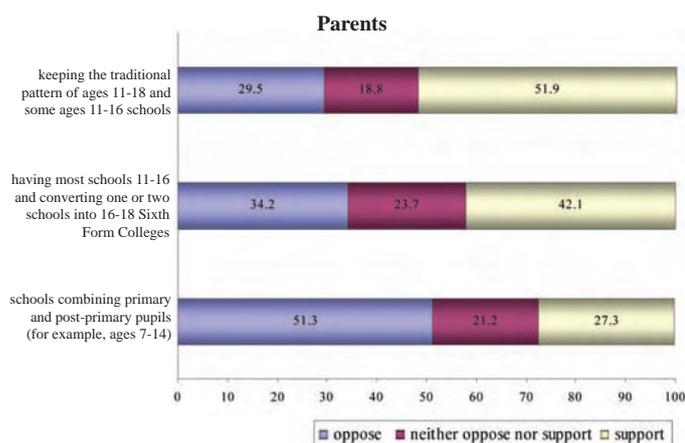
1. Keeping the traditional pattern of ages 11-18 and some ages 11-16 schools
2. Having most schools 11-16 and converting one or two schools into 16-18 Sixth Form Colleges
3. Schools combining primary and post-primary pupils (for example, ages 7-14).

Representatives of local schools/other education providers/regional key stakeholders



The interview materials help to suggest some reasons as to why participants may have held the opinions they did:

1. In the context of the continuing debate on academic selection and post-primary transfer in Northern Ireland, many interviewees and respondents felt that 14-19 was a key age grouping rather than 11-19. A Nationalist politician said that focusing upon the age of 14 would change ‘the whole context of the education... it fits in with all the other reforms – the revised curriculum, flexibility, the Entitlement Framework. And I think the 14-19 is really a critical area particularly now, because... the emphasis is on skilling people up at that age and dealing with things like literacy and numeracy in schools.’
2. The debate was not simply concerned with the age of selection, however, or how post-primary education should be structured, some interviewees drew attention to the fact that pupils in Northern Ireland start school too early altogether. One nationalist politician looked to Europe as a guide: ‘here is this whole idea that we’re teaching our kids the formal side of it far too early. Whereas in Europe it is more play-centred’.
3. A senior representative from a local Education and Library board felt that a 4-14 model ‘may be a solution’. Here it was evident that many variations on age-grouping and their implications had been given serious consideration. If 4-14 was an option there was an acknowledgment that this would obviously impact on the local primary schools and there would be issues in terms of closing some to retain a post-primary presence in certain areas. The interviewee placed the discussion of age-grouping in a context of being concerned for economic and educational sustainability, arguing that ‘in an area with a declining population, in order to make your schools viable in terms of the Entitlement Framework... it would look to me that the 11 to 14 model, 14 to 19 model has certainly won, but...it’s how you structure that ... is it 11 to 14 a junior high school and 14 to 19 a senior high school and so forth?’ This particular representative, however, added an important caveat, maintaining that until decisions are made about academic selection and post-primary transfer it will be difficult for people who are actually looking at the structures to plan with certainty. It seems that there are many contingent and as yet undecided factors which determine a possible change in the age-grouping of schools and the complexities involved appeared to be acutely felt by those interviewees with responsibility for planning in rural areas.



Whereas only a minority (32%) of the representatives of local schools, other education providers and regional key stakeholders supported keeping the traditional age pattern of ages 11-18 and some ages 11-16, a small majority of parents (51.9%) supported this option.

There was no majority opinion among either the representatives or parents with regard to the option of having most schools 11-16 and converting one or two schools into 16-18 Sixth Form Colleges. However, while the largest number of representatives (43%) neither supported nor opposed this option, the largest number of parents (42.1%) were in support.

Only a very small minority of representatives (19%) and of parents (27.3%) supported the option of schools combining primary and post-primary pupils. Indeed, a majority of the parents (51.3%) were opposed. While the largest number of representatives (50%) neither opposed nor supported the option.

In general, representatives were unclear about the proposals to change age-grouping in schools, with no majority opinion emerging on any of the options presented. By comparison, the views of parents were much more mixed: a majority did not wish to retain the status quo (i.e., keeping the traditional pattern), but the two alternatives put to them (i.e., the Sixth Form option and the combining primary and post-primary groupings option) received only minority support.

4. In reviewing possible models some interviewees suggested that we should not be too prescriptive on age-groupings and keep an open mind as the schools' estate is rationalised. Stating a preference to seriously consider 11 to 14, a senior representative of integrated education qualified this position, and maintained that there was need to properly consider 'a multiplicity of models'. This view was justified on the basis of 'I don't think there's one size fits all.'
5. When discussing what models of sharing might be possible between post-primary schools a representative of Catholic education posed this fundamental rhetorical question: 'Should we even be talking about schools at post-11? I think we need to look at different models in different places.' A representative of a local Education and Library Board echoed this sentiment, arguing that 'in certain areas of Northern Ireland the notion of a 4 to 14 school might actually make good sense.' Ultimately this same representative, however, thought that the consideration of new possible models for schools in Northern Ireland was secondary to a higher imperative, namely teaching, and specifically curriculum coherence. Central to this analysis was a belief that the curriculum needs to be seen as the consistent element of the education system. If this could be agreed the interviewee argued that it would be apparent that the core learning phase for pupils is 7-14.

Notes

- 1 Northern Ireland Census 2001, available from <http://www.nisranew.nisra.gov.uk/census/start.html>
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 We would like to thank the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Geographical Information Survey Unit, for assisting us in the mapping exercise for this project. <http://www.nihe.gov.uk>
- 4 Compiled from Department of Education Statistics in November 2007, see <http://www.deni.gov.uk>
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 The authors are grateful for the assistance of the local education authority, the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) in helping to facilitate this roundtable meeting in Coleraine, although they were completely independent of the research and took part solely as a stakeholder and on the same terms as all other participants.
- 7 Garvagh High School is situated just outside the ten mile buffer set for Coleraine. The researchers were advised that the school's pupil catchment would, however, encompass the area being examined. For this reason a decision was made to include the school on the list of those invited to attend the roundtable discussion.
- 8 Permission to record material for data collection purposes obtained from all those who took part in this project. Consent to use the material from the roundtable discussions was subject to a confidentiality clause agreeing that citations would not be attributable to any individual.
- 9 Information on all of the above areas of policies is available from <http://www.deni.gov.uk>
- 10 The 2007 consultation was made possible by generous support from the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Renee B. Fisher Foundation. For more information on the project and its methodology, please visit <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/nireland/>
- 11 *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, pp. 147-174.
- 12 Available from http://www.deni.gov.uk/re_core_syllabus_pdf.pdf
- 13 Department of Education (2007) *The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007*, Department of Education, Bangor.
- 14 Available from <http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/index.asp>
- 15 For more information on the Entitlement Framework introduced by The Education (NI) Order 2006, see http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/80-curriculumandassessment_pg/22-entitlement_framework.htm
- 16 *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, p. 116.
- 17 See for example, the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*, available from <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/>
- 18 Northern Ireland Schools Census, 2007, available from http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg.htm
- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 *Independent Strategic Review of Education*, p. 158.



Comparative Analysis

Shared Campus
Schools in Scotland

Jointly Managed
Church Schools in
England and Ireland

Multi-Denominational
Schools in Ireland

Shared Campus Schools in Scotland

Background and methodology

The education system in Scotland is structured on the basis of two sectors, denominational schools (overwhelmingly Catholic) and non-denominational schools. Non-denominational schools are secular and not viewed as de facto Protestant in the way that many Controlled schools are often considered to be in Northern Ireland. While structurally in Northern Ireland there is a Catholic/Protestant cleavage therefore within the education system, in Scotland, by contrast, the principle division is arguably between Catholicism and secularism.

The management of the Scottish education system is currently determined by the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*, however in terms of denominational provision the key assurances given to the Catholic Church remain from the 1918 Act which effectively transferred the management of Catholic schools to the state (now local education authorities run from the Councils), albeit with three important concessions made so as to safeguard denominational interests:

1. The church maintains the right to approve (or not approve) proposed staff appointments
2. The guarantee that provision must be made for religious instruction and observance, with the church maintaining the right to approve its supervision
3. The requirement that any decision made on the future of a Catholic school must take into consideration the effect on provision, distribution and availability of denominational education, in comparison to other public schools and the alternative arrangements for the religious instruction of the children affected.¹

North Lanarkshire Council is the fourth largest of the 32 local authorities in Scotland. In 2006 the population of the Council area was over 323,000 and the school enrolment was approximately 51,000 (see Figure 13). It is worth noting that all nursery education and special schools are non-denominational and that all denominational schools in North Lanarkshire are Catholic (see Figures 14 & 15).

Figure 13: Education provision in North Lanarkshire 2006²

	Non-denominational	Catholic	Total			
	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools
Primary	16,709	79	11,147	48	27,856	127
Secondary	12,490	16	9,898	9	22,388	25
Special	800	11	-	-	800	11

Figure 14: Catholic and non-denominational primary schools in North Lanarkshire³

Council Area	Non-denominational schools		Catholic schools	
	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools
Airdrie	2,988	15	1,762	9
Bellshill	1,797	6	1,487	4
Coatbridge	1,688	11	2,345	10
Cumbernauld	4,882	20	2,385	11
Motherwell	2,590	12	1,681	8
Wishaw	2,764	15	1,487	6
Total	16,709	79	11,147	48

Figure 15: Catholic and non-denominational post-primary schools in North Lanarkshire⁴

Council Area	Non-denominational schools		Catholic schools	
	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools
Airdrie	2,078	2	1,377	1
Bellshill	685	1	1,041	1
Coatbridge	1,302	2	2,735	2
Cumbernauld	4,013	5	2,021	2
Motherwell	2,268	3	1,491	2
Wishaw	2,144	3	1,233	1
Total	12,490	16	9,898	9

As part of North Lanarkshire's strategic education plan and school building programme, 'Education 2010', the number of shared campus arrangements which co-locate Catholic and non-denominational schools on a single site was to increase in an initial phase from three to a total of ten (see Figure 16) and financed under a Public Private Partnership (PPP). The specification for the Education 2010 PPP shared campus schools were to be designed and operate in accordance with the following principles:

- That the individual identity and autonomy of both schools is maintained
- That the teaching and learning areas for each school are physically separate
- That in educational terms, each school operates independently and develops its own ethos, educational principles and curriculum
- That shared facilities are centrally located with independent access from each school
- That separate public entrances to the schools are created so as to allow the display of iconography related to the distinctive nature of the schools
- That staff rooms are separate but adjacent with flexibility for combining into a larger meeting space
- That the provision of library, PE and assembly facilities is determined by curricular need as specified by the authority

- That shared facilities are sufficient for the combined needs of both schools
- That facilities designated for community, multipurpose and shared uses are not to be closely associated with either school.



A common feature of the shared campus school design in North Lanarkshire is the open plan teaching space which houses all school classrooms in one large area (Case Study 2).

Figure 16: Shared campus provision in North Lanarkshire⁵

Location	ND School (Number of pupils)	Catholic School (Number of pupils)	Other provision on campus	Date Established
Motherwell	Bothwellpark Special School (23)	Our Lady's HS (669)		1996
Motherwell	Clyde View Special School (23)	St Bernadette's PS (224)		1996
Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld PS (599)	St Andrew's PS (196)	Nursery Class	2002
Caldercruix	Glengowan PS (140)	St Mary's PS (85)	Nursery Class	2006
Chapelhall	Chapelhall PS (245)	St Aloysius PS (329)	Nursery Class	2006
New Stevenston	New Stevenston PS (246)	St Patrick's PS (147)	Public Library Nursery Class	2006
Glenboig	Glenboig PS (52)	Our Lady & St Joseph's PS (124)	Nursery Class	2007
Plains	Plains PS (72)	St David's PS (162)	Nursery Class Community Base	2007
Bargeddie	Bargeddie PS (138)	St Kevin's PS (95)	Nursery Class Community Base	2007
Wishaw	Wishaw Academy PS (315)	St Ignatius PS (196)	Nursery Class	2007

For the purposes of this project two case studies of shared campus arrangements were examined in North Lanarkshire, one in the Diocese of Glasgow, and one in the Diocese of Motherwell. To inform the case studies, interviews were conducted with four head teachers from the shared campuses, two senior officials from the local education authority (Council), two key stakeholders who were directly involved in the development of the schools and an independent consultant:

1. The first of the three key stakeholders interviewed was an independent consultant who carried out a Shared Campus Evaluation report in June 2007 and a former post-primary head teacher with 13 years experience in North Lanarkshire Catholic schools.
2. The second was a politician in North Lanarkshire Council, a Vice Convenor of a committee that oversaw this process and who as a locally elected representative

was involved in selling the idea of a shared campus school for two traditionally divided denominational and non-denominational villages in his constituency

3. The third was a senior representative of the Diocese of Motherwell with responsibility for the Catholic schools on seven shared campus sites and was also directly involved in negotiations with North Lanarkshire Council.

We believe that the findings from the two case studies, taken together with the interview materials, ably highlight the advantages and disadvantages of shared campus arrangements in terms of their rationale, physical design and operational management. Given the climate of review and restructuring of the schools' estate in Northern Ireland, it is instructive to ascertain lessons that may be learned from the experiences of sharing and collaboration between schools of different types in Scotland.

Case study one – Diocese of Glasgow

In 1998, as part of a review of primary school provision in North Lanarkshire, it was agreed that priority should be given to a growing new town where the demand for Catholic education was apparent and the existing non-denominational school required capital expenditure for a re-build. According to a Council representative, economic necessity resulted in 'the idea of two schools under the one roof... maximising the sharing of facilities'. The shared campus project provided each school with its own autonomous teaching areas. The shared facilities included a reception/administration office, staff room, library, gym and dining area. Nursery accommodation managed by the head of the Catholic school is also included, although nursery provision in Scotland is non-denominational regardless of the management structure.

When asked if the shared campus has been a success, the head of the Catholic school was unequivocal: 'It's been absolutely fabulous.... It was initially thought the children would constantly be fighting, there would be arguments, they were so different, they wouldn't be used to it, they wouldn't be used to sharing facilities, their playground or playing football together... There were also concerns that the parents would find it difficult and the clergy... would find it difficult... none of the things that people imagined would happen, actually happened.' The head added that the most notable difficulties have been practical concerns. For example, the campus is bigger than many post-primary schools, and so there have been problems with 'transport and parking in the morning, and dropping off children and collecting children'.

Eight reasons that help explain the success of this shared campus:

1. There was church support at the highest level possible. The late Cardinal Winning, an influential figure not only in the Archdiocese of Glasgow but also, as leader of the Catholic Church in Scotland, a man of significant political influence, supported the campus. Cardinal Winning's involvement via his representative, according to senior education officials at the Council, provided 'very strong support... the only thing that was asked for was that there would be the facility to divide the single staff room into two, so that the Catholic staff could have their own meetings should they so wish.'⁶
2. There was substantive parental support for the project. According to the Council although there were some parents 'who would have preferred free standing schools', there was also 'a significant lobby' in favour of the campus. This element of parental support was confirmed by an independent evaluation.⁷
3. The location was favourable as it is a new town, relatively prosperous, where parental choice appears to be influenced by geographical convenience as much as by religious identities. A senior education official argued that 'there was also evidence ... that old allegiances were becoming weaker. For example, Protestant and non-Catholic parents may have been sending their children to the Catholic school because it was seen to be a better school'.
4. There was a strong economic rationale. This was most strongly and continually emphasised by the Council who claimed it to be their primary motivation. A Council policy document outlined the case that 'shared facilities would reduce the overall per-pupil cost of new schools, make the building of small schools more efficient and therefore reduce the pressure for closures and amalgamations. It would allow the provision of more extensive facilities for pupils and the wider community from the same funding'. Savings of around 25 percent in capital costs are made compared to two free standing school according to the Council (see Figure 17).
5. The ethos and identity of the Catholic school was protected. The Catholic head teacher was firm in the view that its ethos as a Catholic school had not been compromised. 'I can understand why prior to joint campuses opening that that was a concern. I think people saw it as the thin end of the wedge and this was the beginning of the end for Catholic schools. But having worked in a... campus for 5 years, I would have said the opposite has been what's happened... I do not think you would get a more Catholic school than [name of her school]... We are very clearly St [name of school] Roman Catholic Primary School and [name of non-denominational school] are quite clearly [name of non-denominational school]'. The head insisted that not only was the Catholic ethos of the school maintained, but in fact it was increased, as a consequence of being so concerned and sensitive to possible accusations of letting the ethos diminish.
6. There were two head teachers with excellent leadership qualities and a good personal working relationship. So much of the success of the shared campus model appears to depend on the attitudes, working relationship, and leadership qualities of the two heads. When interviewed, they acknowledged that it is hard to see a successful partnership of equal schools sharing a space if there were significant personality clashes at the level of the day-to-day management.

7. There was one shared staff room. The Diocese of Glasgow were concerned about a shared staff room, but by the time this issue was raised the building was complete. In an attempt to address the concern a folding partition was introduced so that staff room could be separated. The partition has never been used, perhaps a fitting metaphor and testament to the professionalism and levels of co-operation between the two sets of teachers. The head of the Catholic school strongly maintained that the joint staff room had been absolutely ‘inestimable in making the campus work.’ The children in this school, it was pointed out ‘have their intervals together, they have their play times together, they have their lunches together. We encourage them to do all sorts of joint activities... to ask the children to do one thing, [and] for us to do something else would have been a bit obverse’.

8. The children play together. With pupils from the two schools wearing different uniforms, mixing and not dividing into rival teams based on individual school identity for play and sport is encouraged. For example, a decision was taken that the mixing of teams would be encouraged, to help mitigate any potential conflicts. This according to the teachers had been successful: ‘we have got a joint football team which was always going to be a contentious ... But from day one... we insisted that it wasn’t ever [name of school] playing against [name of other school] on the pitch... Football causes fights and arguments in primary schools across Lanarkshire whether it is a joint campus or whatever ... And they do have their scraps, but it’s always to do with football, it’s never to do because he is in [name of school] and because he is in [name of other school].’ As a result of this success in the playground, the two schools are represented in the local schools’ league as one composite team – and the team is simply called by the conjoined name of each school.

After the opening of the first case study in North Lanarkshire – but crucially in the Diocese of Glasgow – there was a gap of four years before the next tranche of 7 shared campus schools opened in the Diocese of Motherwell. Following visits to the first case study school in the planning stages by representatives of the Motherwell Diocese, it quickly became evident that they had serious concerns over the form of design and the proximity of many of the shared spaces and facilities at that school and would not be happy with this model for the 7 shared campuses proposed. In 2004 the Bishop of Motherwell wrote to the education department of North Lanarkshire Council outlining four matters of concern. First, that the proposed public entrances and reception areas were not physically separate to an adequate degree. Second, that the Catholic school staff rooms should not be part of, or adjoin, the non-denominational staff room but should be adjacent to, or within, the Catholic classroom area. Third, that the campus library should not be a shared provision. Fourth, that there would be unacceptable cross-over of staff and pupils during the school day.⁹

Following negotiations the Council made amendments to the design of this and six other proposed shared campuses ‘at a cost of over £650,000 to meet the Motherwell Diocese demands. Public entrances were redesigned, Catholic staff rooms were relocated and a commitment was given that the shared library would contain only materials acceptable to both head teachers.’¹⁰ The Diocese remained however, unsatisfied with these changes and felt compelled to refer the matter, under section 22D of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*, to the devolved Scottish government for adjudication.

The impasse was eventually overcome when the government found in favour of the Council’s position. But a final agreement on the design was only achieved after the Council, concerned by the impact of delay caused by judicial review and a possible referral to the House of Lords on the continuing support of the Council’s private finance partner, conceded on the issue of separate staff rooms and agreed to move the Catholic staff rooms to be adjacent to the Catholic classrooms. The Council also provided for two separated administrative offices and agreement was reached on the provision of a single library in that any materials that were deemed not to be appropriate to both schools would remain within the one school.

Figure 17: Comparative construction costs for two 150 pupil primary schools⁸

	Two free standing schools	Two shared campus schools	Single school
Area	3800m ²	2630m ²	2350m ²
Cost/pupil	£26,000	£18,000	£16,000
Total cost	£7.8m	£5.4m	£4.9m

Case study two – Diocese of Motherwell

Evidently now a working success and showing excellent signs of mutual respect and, where appropriate, collaboration and optimal flexibility between the two schools, this shared campus did not start in the easiest of circumstances. Opened in September 2006 in an established village in North Lanarkshire, the two heads found huge initial problems to do with the physical building process. The non-denominational head recalled 'It was a disaster and people were all arguing with everybody else because of the children's movements and the distraction of movements ... we were actually brought on site with St [name of denominational school] still standing and it had to be demolished, where the car park now is. ... I felt very sad for their staff and for [name of school] community because they were seeing their old school getting taken down bit by bit ... it was very difficult.'

Overall there were six significant findings from this case study:

1. Community divisions impacted upon the schools. When asked to clarify if initial difficulties were simply down to the building site or because of opposition to the idea of sharing, it became obvious that this particular campus was created in a village marked by the separation of Catholic and Protestant communities. One of the head teachers maintained 'we are living in the West of Scotland... we are not living in a wee suburb somewhere in England. This is a village community and therefore the adults were or are very segregated. To be honest, we have got the Orange Hall and we have got the chapel next door and never the twain shall meet... that was something which personally I don't think the authority saw as being a major issue, but we knew at the local level we were going to have to batter down a lot of doors'.
2. As a shared space the campus has had a positive impact on the community. When pressed on whether now, because of the shared campus, they thought attitudes had changed in the village, the non-denominational head was forthright and cited the example of 'parents who probably never had any dealings with one another helping each other... hopefully, the community involvement that we are trying to generate will...break these barriers down further.' The head of the Catholic school agreed and pointed out that the 'shared site has forced parents to mix where it wouldn't have happened before'. Both of the interviewees claimed that tolerance had increased but were realistic on what can be achieved: 'we know that adults have got fixed ideas and it is surely the new generation that we have to work on in order to break down these barriers; it's the children that



A wider community and educational benefit of the shared campus school is the public library (with separate entrance) directly attached to the school (Case Study 2).

we now have who will be the adults of the future that we hope to make the most difference with.'

3. There is a need to inform and consult with parents. When both heads were asked if any parents had said to them they would remove their child because they did not approve of the shared campus, it emerged that this was indeed the case with the non-denominational school but not with the parents of children who attended the Catholic school. Having said this, the Catholic head indicated that they considered the process to have been 'extremely stressful' as parents questioned 'why have you let this happen? We didn't have any say.' The conclusion drawn from this experience was that meaningful consultation had not taken place (a claim that the education department would contest) with parents and the process would have been easier had there been a more concerted effort made by the Council and church to include parents in their deliberations.
4. Once again, the leadership qualities and working relationship of the two head teachers was crucial for success. Despite personal misgivings and doubts, the head teachers realised the value of maintaining a united front. The non-denominational head felt that they went out on a limb and were not supported as well as they should have been by the Council: 'we were incredibly supportive of the authority, but sometimes at the back of your mind you were saying, "Why are we doing this?"' The council maintains however that it did provide support mechanisms and structures for the heads and teaching staff of the campuses and recognised this as a necessary condition for success.
5. Sustained contact between children and young people was seen as having positive results. For the head teacher of the Catholic school sharing and mixing (contact) has been a success for the pupils: 'All the little things that we did as far as the children were concerned I think were the things that worked ... every child can go anywhere...they go into the dining hall... they can

sit with whoever they want... they have absolutely no worries about sitting beside somebody they have never seen before.' The head of the non-denominational school agreed that a lot of progress had been made in a short period time, that the campus was an education environment where differences are respected and where the pupils know that they are in a 'supportive environment'. This outcome was thought to be 'a huge thing to have actually managed to generate and reinforce... within a year and a half' of the school opening.

6. Once again, the ethos and identity of the Catholic school was protected. Importantly, when asked if there were any concerns that a shared site had diminished ethos, the head of Catholic school said, 'no. I think that we are still operating in exactly the same way. Parents had concerns ... and one of the things I remember hearing was "oh, well, you will not be allowed to have your sacramental displays, statues". That hasn't happened... even our welcome mat identifies...us as a Catholic school...We take the children to church for worship as usual. we [have] services for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist and parents came into the services... those kind of Catholic issues are still going on within the joint campus school'.

The views of an independent consultant

In December 2006, an independent review was carried out to evaluate the shared campus arrangements. North Lanarkshire Council chose a consultant whom they knew could not have been considered objectionable by the Diocese of Motherwell. The person in question had 13 years experience as a head teacher of two post-primary Catholic schools in the area, was a member of the Catholic Education Commission in Scotland for 8 years and a former Head of Service within educational administration. To complete the evaluation, staff, pupils and parents of the shared campus schools were questioned. The consultant also examined similar arrangements across Scotland. The interview conducted for this project with the consultant revealed seven general themes or findings that are noteworthy:

1. The shared campus schools were viewed as pragmatic agreements. The consultant maintained that projects outside of North Lanarkshire had not been part of a strategy or any broadly based initiative. Rather, they were responses 'to councillor pressure or parental pressure.' In North Lanarkshire however, the local educational authority had developed a building programme and proactively sought engagement with the

Catholic church. The evaluation found no evidence of hidden agendas regarding integration or the backdoor closure of Catholic schools, no substantiation for the charge of social engineering, just quite simply local solutions to local problems.

2. Preparation and an agreed protocol between the schools was considered a requisite for success. The consultant stressed that 'preparation is not essential...but I think it is highly desirable'. It was explained that the schools had developed protocols and that where these had been followed there were no problems, but in one or two cases the head teachers had disregarded the protocol or let aspects of it slip and that this was when difficulties often emerged. An example was provided of a campus where some non-denominational parents objected to the presence of religious icons (a crucifix) in the common foyer of the school which the protocol actively discouraged.
3. The experience of children from different type of schools travelling, playing and interacting with each other on a sustained basis was positive. One of the most significant findings from the consultant's evaluation were the responses from the pupils themselves with regards to issues like name-calling, bullying and travelling to and from school. In all of the shared campuses the consultant noted there was remarkable lack of conflict over identity. 'When I spoke to the children I had a little questionnaire I used...What is it like walking to school in the morning? Or, if you come by bus, coming by bus? What's it like in the playground? Are there any problem areas? Where do you play together? ... Kids are always remarkably honest and the major message I was picking up was that there isn't a big issue. One of the kids said to me that it was great because we can now walk to school together.'
4. There was some different perceptions over the levels of discipline in the partner schools. The consultant found that a number of staff in two Catholic schools felt that they had higher standards of pupil discipline compared to the non-denominational schools. By comparison the consultant found that a number of staff in the non-denominational schools felt that pupil discipline in some Catholic schools was too strict. Referring to personal experience as an inspector of schools, however, led to the conclusion that there were 'simply different forms of discipline'. And so, while asymmetries of educational approach may often be cited as a reason why schools can't successfully co-locate, the consultant maintained that evidence in North Lanarkshire proved this to be a largely unfounded concern.

5. The curriculum was not affected. The consultant acknowledged that in some instances there had been a fear that one school on a campus may suffer in terms of its curriculum delivery and standards as a consequence of having to accommodate their partner school. But the evaluation did not find any evidence of this in practice.
6. Shared campus arrangements do not threaten the existence of Catholic schools or school ethos but the church remains nonetheless wedded to free standing schools. The response to the evaluation from the Diocese was a measured, cautious welcome and the consultant was naturally satisfied that they did not disagree with the key findings. It was pointed out that the church was actually glad 'that I picked up other of the issues like congestion, parking and so on' as these practical matters were concerns for them also. However, 'these are nothing to do with the denomination.' The consultant suggested that those involved should take a degree of satisfaction from their success, but proffered caution as 'this is still early, five years from now who knows what we will be saying about how they are running.' Overall, it was concluded that the initial soundings from the evaluation were good and it was felt that the Diocese were due credit 'because they have been party of the process...getting people on board.' Bearing this conclusion in mind there was, however, an all important qualifier, 'whilst they might agree that shared campus schools are progressing satisfactorily at this early stage, it is not going to change their perspective which is, quite simply, free standing Catholic schools are the best way to develop communities'.
7. The attitude of the Catholic church towards the shared campus arrangements may raise charges of double standards and the pursuance of sectional interests. On a number of occasions the church has disputed the necessity for a shared campus, and argued that the Council should instead provide a new free-standing Catholic school since the population in the local area concerned was notably large enough to support this outcome. This stance is underpinned by the view that the Catholic Church has only responsibility to maintain Catholic educational provision and does not have responsibility for other types of schools. This raises the issue of whether the Church is unreasonable: 'they don't mind the shared campus model if it is being used to protect a [small] Catholic school but have objections to it being used to protect a non-denominational school.' This, it appears to us, is one the most significant and compelling reasons as to why there must be some degree of caution in advocating shared campus arrangements. If the stakeholders involved are not willing to engage in

the process on an equal basis generally, then there is risk that the overall approach could become stagnated or a source of conflict.

The views of a North Lanarkshire councillor

For the purposes this project, and to ensure a diversity of opinions were obtained on the shared campuses, an interview was conducted with a local North Lanarkshire councillor. This person was selected on the grounds that they had been Vice-Chair of the committee charged with developing the projects, and, as a local representative, had also been directly involved in explaining the proposals to constituents and encouraging parental support for the new arrangements. The interview revealed four general themes or findings:

1. Support from the local denominations was crucial. Indeed, it was deemed necessary to ensure that the local clergy as well as the Catholic hierarchy were committed to delivering the campuses. But than more than this, the politician indicated how important it was to encourage 'all denominations' to back the projects. Although the Protestant churches did not have a direct function in the management of the schools, their role within the community was recognised as significant in guaranteeing the success or failure of the task at hand. So, for instance, in [name of town] which was referenced as being 'the toughest nut to crack because of local difficulties ... Parish Priest Father [name] was tremendous in actually recognising the reality and putting it across to his parishioners. As was Reverend [name] and the Kirk ... The point crucially, is bringing on board whatever denomination at local level, as well as support at a higher level.'
2. Local meetings, political leadership and consultation with community so as to explain the reasons and benefits of proposed shared campuses were highlighted. The interviewee made quite clear, that in their opinion 'both local politicians and officials from the local education authority did work at the ground level ... I tended to do the sell locally. Selling or getting the people on board is the crucial factor and getting round to community meetings and public meetings, [there were] some very hostile public meetings ... there was always the doubt, the suspicion, that we were trying to pull a fast one... on the intention of what's being proposed they'[d] say "well you're the councillor for this area why's this getting proposed?" ... Right from day one the relevant community councils were on board, had they not been then I think it would have been more difficult'.

3. The fact the projects resulted in new school buildings and facilities that were of benefit for the entire community was a significant factor in galvanising public opinion. The development of new builds, rather than using one of the existing schools as part of an extended improvement programme, was viewed, with hindsight, as having embedded a sense of combined ownership among the members of community. This, it was suggested, reduced the sense of loss. During the interview the councillor stressed: 'I'm not an expert on this, but I can talk to you from experience and say... the original proposal, when we started discussing it about five or six years ago, was to look at the status of the two schools in an objective criteria sense – which is the best building?... That is a non-starter... it's cheaper, but... you're going to have to address the falling school rolls in the first place and the buildings tend to be inferior, but also it's the mentality, or should we say the psychology... If my child is in that school and that's the one that's closing, then I'm losing my identity... Although I don't think we realised it at the time, when the political decision was made not to refurbish I think that was crucial. I think it would have been far harder in the rural localities ... to say "you're closing, there's only ninety of you there, but there's plenty of classes across the road". That's a loss of identity. That's a slap in the face'.
4. A sense of community loss is nevertheless hard to avoid. Even among supporters it seems from the interview that there was a feeling of nostalgia and sense of loss in the demolition of 'the old building'. The politician was sensitive to this and noted that 'people do have a connection with [the] local building. I mean people have said to me how brilliant the new schools [are], but "wasn't it sad to see the old school coming down" ... they just see it as sad to see the loss of the school. We came across that in various schools... there is a significant chunk of each community that feel like they are losing something.'

The views of a senior representative of the Diocese of Motherwell

As a major stakeholder in the shared campuses, it was necessary to capture the attitudes and opinions of the Catholic Church. To do this, an interview was conducted with a senior representative from the Diocese of Motherwell who had responsibility for Catholic schools on seven shared campus sites. This person was also involved in negotiations with North Lanarkshire Council. The interview revealed three issues of substantive significance:

1. The Diocese had reluctantly engaged and supported the new arrangements on a basis of pragmatism because the alternative might be to risk losing Catholic educational provision altogether in the areas affected. The interviewee recognised that they faced a choice: 'a shared campus school which keeps the Catholic provision or we bus the children to the nearest Catholic school'. Overall, it was felt that the church had been co-operative, that they were not against the principle of a shared campus. However, this acceptance was limited to rural areas and it was made clear that the Bishop had said: "I am not accepting a shared campus school in an urban setting." In their view if a problem arises with the sustainability of Catholic schools in an urban area, and if the preferred option of stand alone school was not viable, then the second option is to merge two Catholic schools. Moreover, although it was accepted that Catholic education might benefit in some limited settings from the shared campus arrangements, there was no sense in which this engagement was thought to place a corresponding responsibility upon the church to consider the option in order to help protect non-denominational provision. In other words, a successful Catholic school need not take cognisance of the circumstances in which a struggling non-denominational neighbour might happen to find itself.
2. The reluctant attitude of the Diocese to fully embrace shared campuses must be understood in a context where there is a fear of increasing secularism throughout Scottish society and the concomitant diminution of the faith. When asked if they were happy that the Catholic ethos and integrity had been maintained in shared campuses, the interviewee said 'we have limited experience, we've only been probably two years opening these schools ... and at the end of the day we may fine tune'. When pressed on this issue a little further, however, the opinion that there is a continuing need for stand alone Catholic schools was apparent: 'we're the minority now, we're the counter-culture because we are Christian and because there are fewer of us... So we're fighting a battle.' The Diocese felt this position was vindicated by a number of salient factors, firstly that the majority of 'Catholic parents continue to send their children to Catholic schools,' and secondly, 'the academic achievement in their schools and the Government Inspectors reports continually [commented] on the good pastoral approach of the schools and how the children are taught.' It was argued that Catholic schools are themselves inclusive and so can accommodate the diversity and sharing that take places in the campuses. This was illustrated by the example of Muslim parents who often enrol their children in Catholic schools, 'particularly their girls.'

3. The Diocese had specific concerns that there may be a hidden agenda to force the integration of Catholic pupils with those from non-denominational schools through the use of shared campuses. The fear of integration was highlighted by the head teacher of Catholic school situated on a shared campus site who looked out of his window and saw two children hand in hand, one from each school, playing together. The head teacher turned to this interviewee, and said, 'that's what it's all about.' But this senior representative of the church was appalled, commenting 'that's not what it is all about!' This counter response may itself appear a surprising reaction. How could anyone see children, coming from different backgrounds playing together and forming friendships as something other than a positive development? And yet, when we consider the rationale upon which the Catholic Church has engaged with the shared campus arrangements in Scotland perhaps this reaction is somewhat understandable. The principle motivating factor for these arrangements, according to North Lanarkshire Council was economic, not to socially engineer or risk diluting catholic education. When it was suggested to the interviewee, that Catholic schools may have a role to play in fostering better relations in the wider community outside of the school, the response was succinct but unspecific, 'we do that. Our children and our teachers don't live in isolation from the community.' *The Charter for Catholic schools in Scotland* (see Appendix C) prescribes ten commitments. Number eight is 'a commitment to ecumenical action and the unity of Christians'. It was suggested to the Diocesan representative that this may mean that a purpose of a Catholic education is not just to maintain a Catholic ethos but to reach out to others and in this respect shared-campus might fulfil the ecumenical mission of Catholic schools in Scotland. In responding, the interviewee made comparative distinction between Scotland and Northern Ireland, in which the fear of a secularism was evident: 'Yes, there is an ecumenical [element] ... but the non-denominational schools are not Christian schools. So I can see in the Northern Ireland situation where you are talking Christian to Christian but we don't have that. And the non-denominational schools are becoming more and more secular as the days go on because they are reflecting society.'

Lessons for Northern Ireland

The shared campus arrangements, with their separate but equal status for Catholic and non-denominational schools do work in Scotland. Moreover, Catholic head teachers are firm in the view that the individual identity and ethos of Catholic schools has not been compromised. Of course, Scotland and Northern Ireland are different, but nevertheless some meaningful parallels can be drawn and, as a consequence, several observations emerge:

1. The primary evidence from head teachers is that, while the shared campuses are still very much works in progress, they have nevertheless been a general success. This is despite complaints about the building process and design and other operational or practical constraints. The independent consultant, having looked at shared campuses outside North Lanarkshire – across south Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Fife, concluded succinctly that they are 'a pragmatic solution to a local problem. It wasn't part of a strategy, it wasn't part of any broadly based initiative'. In North Lanarkshire however, the local educational authority had specifically devised a building programme and consulted throughout with the Catholic church. The evaluation found no evidence of hidden agendas regarding integration or the backdoor closure of Catholic schools and no substantiation for the charge of social engineering. Having said that, it is clear to us that the rationale for sharing must be unambiguous and agreed from the outset. The value added side benefits which can arise as a result of the physical sharing of space and mixing of pupils and staff has to be acknowledged and where possible anticipated. Failing to undertake this exercise will risk the charge of a hidden agenda and will test relationships between those who are responsible for managing the sites.
2. Catholic ethos and identity can be appropriately protected and maintained and hence need not be diminished or diluted. The local education authority argued this case strongly, but much more important are the opinions of Catholic teachers, the independent evaluation and its acceptance by the Diocesan authority.
3. Pupils from the different schools mixed and there was no evidence of division, physical conflict or bullying or harassment. The children walk to school together, play together in the playground and travel home together without adverse reactions or incidents caused by identity.

4. The independent evaluation having questioned children on their own, independent of possible teacher or parental pressure, established this point convincingly. Name-calling was very minimal and not at all evident in the majority of shared campuses. There was no evidence from the children, parents or teachers of denominational bullying in the playground or travelling to or from school.
5. The benefits, or otherwise, of a perceived 'added value' from mixing and sharing, needs to be discussed. Wider social benefits of increased contact cannot simply be invoked after the event to justify an initial decision to share. This was evidenced by the opinion of the Catholic Diocese who opposed the 'added value' argument because it was not the basis upon which they understood the project. As a consequence, using this language only served to raise suspicions reflected in comments such as 'we were sold a pup', 'hidden agendas', 'back door integration', and 'the slippery slope' to secular schools.
6. For staff and head teachers, operational and logistical matters often outweigh concerns over ethos and identity. Flexible timetabling and the physical architecture are crucial for success.
7. Protocols on sharing have to be established and they now have been in North Lanarkshire, although on reviewing this document (see Appendix D) it seems that the spirit of sharing and collaboration is missing, the emphasis is not on what can be shared, but what must not be allowed to crossover. While the protocol has the vital quality of clarity and unequivocal guidelines – preventing dispute over unstated ambiguities and 'grey areas' – the impression remains that this document is less than charitable in tone and attitude towards the non-denominational co-located school.
8. Parents and the local community must be consulted and made to feel they have been consulted meaningfully and their voice factored in to any decisions that result.
9. New builds have proved vital, lest one school survives and the other is lost and demolished, this leads to a zero sum mentality. A fresh start on an equal basis may provide or engender a sense of shared ownership and affinity which may make it easier to overcome any sense of loss.
10. Leadership is extremely important. Staff and head teachers set an example by sharing and cooperating in practice.
11. Support from the local clergy and church hierarchy is vital. Although the vast majority of the boundaries of North Lanarkshire fall within the Diocese of Motherwell, the boundaries of Scotland's Catholic Diocese do not match those of local government in general. This is significant in that the respective Bishop in charge of each Diocese, exercises considerable autonomy in matters of education. For example, Cardinal Winning supported shared campuses, subject to a number of concerns being addressed. By contrast, Bishop Devine of the Motherwell Diocese, strongly contested the design and consultation process for shared campuses with the local authority.
12. There has perhaps been too much emphasis on issues of economics and ethos, almost to the exclusion of everything else. When examining the shared campus model, the educational benefits and multi-functional use of buildings as suggested by the education authority must not be overlooked. For example, having nursery provision, a public library and all-weather football pitches on a single site. There is a reasonable conclusion that the overall provision is better as a result.

Notes

- 1 In practice the third safeguard means that where a proposed closure or amalgamation does not have the approval of the Catholic church, consent of the devolved Scottish government is required.
- 2 This information was compiled in June 2006 by North Lanarkshire Council (the local education authority) in the form of an internal policy discussion document and made available to the authors in February 2008.
- 3 *ibid*
- 4 *ibid*
- 5 *ibid*
- 6 Cardinal Winning died in June 2001 before the school was opened.
- 7 A copy of the interim evaluation report from June 2007 was made available to the authors.
- 8 Information supplied by North Lanarkshire Council (the local education authority), compiled in June 2006.
- 9 *ibid*.
- 10 *ibid*.

Jointly Managed Church Schools in England and Ireland

Background and methodology

Jointly managed Protestant and Catholic schools are not part of any organised movement; they have no national or international governing body. They are independent initiatives created in response to local circumstances and only recently has a directory been published trying to collate and categorise information on how many of them there are and their location.¹ Of the 19 schools listed in this directory, one is in Australia, one in The United States of America and 16 are in the United Kingdom (none of which are in Northern Ireland) and one in Ireland (see Figure 18).

This project examined four schools, three joint Anglican (Church of England) and Catholic foundation schools in the South West region of England and one joint Anglican (Church of Ireland) and Catholic school in the midlands region of Ireland. The aim was to ascertain from face-to-face semi-structured interviews with their respective head teacher:

1. Why they opened
2. How they operate, particularly in terms of ethos and religious education
3. Level of parental involvement.

Two of the four interviews were joint interviews (i.e., the respective head was accompanied by either their deputy head or the head of Religious Education at the school). The rationale was to see whether or not there might be lessons to be learned from the history and current practice of these schools applicable to Northern Ireland.

Figure 18: Joint Protestant and Catholic Schools in the United Kingdom and Ireland²

Location	Country	Age Range/Type	Year of Foundation
Harrogate	England	16-18	1973
Torquay	England	11-18	1974
Surrey	England	11-18	1975
Devon	England	3 months to 19 years	1978
Somerset	England	11-16	1982
Berkshire	England	9-13	c.1985
North Yorkshire	England	11-16	1988
Cambridge	England	11-16	c.1990
Essex	England	5-11	1990
Dorset	England	12-18	1991
Cambridgeshire	England	5-11	1994
Liverpool	England	3-11	1997
Barnsley	England	11-16	2001
Liverpool	England	11-16	2005
Laois	Ireland	4-12	2005
Wrexham	Wales	11-16	2006
Gloucester	England	11-16	2007

Case study one - Somerset

Founded in Somerset, in 1982 as a joint Catholic-Anglican school, this is a post-primary (11-16 years of age) non-selective state voluntary aided co-educational school with 350 pupils. There is a governing body of sixteen, including representatives from both churches, eight foundation governors (four Catholic and four Anglican) and also two parent-governors. The head and deputy head teacher (who is also responsible for overseeing the delivery of religious education) were interviewed together.

The school opened with its current status in 1982 when a previous school on the same site, a secondary modern school (comprehensive) was earmarked for closure, and the two churches – the Clifton Diocese (Catholic) and Bath and Wells Diocese (Anglican) – were both looking at the possibility of opening post-primary schools in Taunton. Neither would have been able to do that on their own, so they approached the local authority jointly and asked if they could take over the building. It closed as a state school in the August and re-opened as a Church school in September.

Problems became evident when, shortly after opening, the school passed an Ofsted inspection but failed the Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools. According to the head teacher, the school failed this first church inspection because the inspection team judged that the school lacked a clear vision. As the head put it, the ‘problem was that they couldn’t work out where we were going or what our purpose was as a joint-church school – it just wasn’t clear’. By way of solution, the school and its governors focused on developing a new ethos statement. Interestingly, the head claimed that these ‘were really good days, and I think it brought the governance together, and again, a clear direction came out of that – understanding the nature of our school, and its joint foundation.’

This process took place in March 2006 and the new ethos statement was then launched in September 2006 as ‘Believing, Belonging and Becoming through Christ’.

According to the head, initially, the new statement generated a considerable ‘theological debate’. Whereas the Catholic view was that the statement should have read ‘in Christ’, the head’s view was that it should read ‘through Christ’ to better reflect the idea of people ‘sharing their journey and presenting ideas and philosophies ... not imposing’.

Special meetings were set aside at the weekend to resolve and agree the ethos statement. These were facilitated by a representative from both the Catholic diocese, and the Anglican diocese. Looking back, the head now considers this to have been a ‘really crucial piece of work that was

done by the governors’ and that the exercise had been successful, because it ‘clarified the vision of the school. I think there is a lot better understanding of what our intentions are now, and I think particularly from the governors point of view that now they have a better understanding of where we want to go, and what we want to do.’

Examination of the profile of the pupils at the school quickly demonstrates that this joint foundation school is not the product of a safe, middle class social experiment: the school serves the third most deprived socio-economic area in South Somerset, which invites comparisons of education in the school to ‘mission work’. The school has a large special needs department, because, on entry, one third of students have a reading age below 9 (again, the school’s pupil age range is 11-16).

Taunton, like Northern Ireland, is experiencing a severe decline in enrolment numbers. The decline has affected this particular school disproportionately: the current enrolment is about 350, down 150 since 1996. Enrolment is also suffering due to the fact that there are five post-primary schools in the area two of which Ofsted classes as ‘outstanding’, the remaining three as ‘satisfactory’. As one might expect, parents generally prefer to send their children to the outstanding schools, which according to the head, has resulted in their school being ‘viewed as the sink school for Taunton... we have all the special needs, and we get the lowest results because of the nature of the kids that we take. We also take in a lot of students during the year that haven’t managed to cope in other schools.’

In terms of academic achievement, the school has a significant number of pupils who do very well, but the spread of ability is unevenly distributed across the year groups: ‘we haven’t got a middle, it’s the middle we lack. And it’s the middle that on your results you can make the difference with.’ Last year, however, was considered good in one aspect of enrolment since the Catholic dimension of the school improved with the number of Polish children enrolling. The Catholic balance of the school has also been helped recently by intake from families from Brazil, Portugal, Estonia and Lithuania.

It was striking that the school had such little parental involvement. Indeed, the head admitted that ‘we struggle to get parents in for anything ... we don’t have a PTA, we can’t get parents to come.’ This problem also extends to academic activities, in which, of a year group of 70-80 pupils, only a quarter of parents will typically attend. The head attributes this problem to the parents simply not having an interest: ‘a lot of our parents, I would say, locally, didn’t have good experiences themselves in education’ and

hence 'do not see education as a priority. While there is a minority who are very supportive and attend everything, it appears to be the same few all the time.'

At GCSE level religious education is taught in a world faiths context but the school focuses particularly on the differences between Anglican and Catholic views, for example, in the area of medical ethics. As such, religious education is predominantly Christian.

Other world faiths are taught in Year 7 so that students might gain an understanding of different religions and belief systems. In Year 8 they do a section on Judaism and a section on Islam, although, as the head pointed out, 'throughout the school we're constantly referring back to Christian vision and Christian belief.' This Christian emphasis is highlighted by curricular choice, delimiting the options available to pupils.

Worship is considered an essential part of school life. Every day there is an act of worship, usually in the classroom at 8.45 am, based on the celebration of Christian principles and values. Every staff member has to lead an act of worship.

Anglicanism and Catholicism are clearly presented as separate traditions within one faith. However, this can lead to confusion, since pupils sometimes struggle to identify one or the other tradition as 'Christian'. The deputy head was very aware of this particular problem, stating that, 'even now, I've just marked their mock exam, and a couple of them put "Catholics believe... but Christians say..."' Somewhat ironically, the deputy went on to say that the teachers were able to redress this problem, but only because most of the pupils are not practicing Christians and hence could learn about the separate traditions in much the same way as they might learn about distinctions within any academic discipline.

Because neither tradition is privileged or promoted over the other, the school was asked if there was an ecumenical purpose to the school, but this was denied, albeit not explicitly, 'Teaching about the faith, not teaching the faith, I think would be the way to sum it up. I mean we have a lot of input from our two chaplains, but the tendency is that it's extra-curricular, it's outside the classroom, not taught in the classroom.' The Protestant and Catholic chaplains were invited into the classroom (again, for example, to teach different views on ethical issues such as abortion), but the deputy stressed that 'we try to get the children to understand is that it doesn't mean that you're not a Christian because your view's slightly different from that person's, it's all interpretation'. Yet, as indicated above, the pupils were not generally aware of the differences between

the two religious traditions. Moreover, there is no iconography of note on display, no statues of Mary in the school for example, which we were told reflected the history of the development of the school rather than any deliberate policy.

Because the head has to attend all local authority head teacher conferences, Catholic and Anglican, she has come to realise that other Catholic head teachers do not see the school as a Catholic school. Catholic heads at a conference 'were having a debate and it was getting quite heated because Catholic schools don't think joint-faith schools are [Catholic]'. However, the head went on to say that the Catholic diocese of Clifton would fight against such perceptions, since it 'is very committed to the joint ethos and our existence.' Finally, the isolated geographical location of the school is seen as a problem in terms of high-level church support.

Although a school questionnaire showed that only between four to five percent of the school population are church-goers, the school has noticed that 'in the last two or three years there's a lot more students particularly who've got involved in activities which have a Christian basis, like Christian Union.' The two local churches also visit the school frequently. In these respects, the Christian aspect of the school seems to have grown. Outside the gates of the school however, in the wider community it was admitted that the impression and understanding of the school was perceived differently 'because the community has so little understanding of what a church school is, full stop, in any context, let alone a shared-faith school. They haven't got the language to discuss it or any kind of idea ... [or] theology behind it, and I think that's also quite challenging'.

When pressed as to what was considered to be the main driving motive of the school (i.e. whether it is a school that just happens to have, through local and historical pragmatic reasons, a joint-faith dimension, or whether it is very much driven by the ethos of a joint-faith school) the deputy head was unequivocal that 'the ethos is really the driving force'. This ethos is reflected in both curriculum choices and two projects at the school, namely a restorative justice programme and the Emmaus Centre.

The deputy acknowledged that, although the idea of restorative justice was a very secular idea, it was consonant with the Christian foundation of the school, particularly the value of forgiveness. For example, with respect to instances of bullying, the idea is to give pupils (or sometimes even pupils and teachers) 'the opportunity to sit down with a facilitator and try to discuss what's gone wrong and put things right – both the victim and the perpetrator.' Sometimes, this resulted in a contract being

drawn up outlining how the parties might move forward with their relationship. Significantly, the deputy head claimed not just that this strategy has met with some success, but that it is 'a really important part of what we do'.

This restorative justice initiative arises out of the context in which the school finds itself. Originally run by a police officer who still works in the school in a Youth Offending Team (YOT), the initiative was based at the school because it has the highest number of young offenders in Taunton and also a large number of children who have emotional behaviour difficulties.

Case study two - Devon

The Headmaster was interviewed at this school in Devon, a joint Anglican and Roman Catholic foundation set up in 1979. It is a co-educational, independent (fee paying), boarding and day school with an ecumenical outlook, and attracts many international pupils. The school buildings and Christian origins date to the nineteenth century when Redemptorist Brothers, who settled in this part of Devon in 1829, started to build what was first to be a seminary. In the early twentieth century, the site became a Convent school, the Convent of Notre Dame for Ladies, until the sisters moved out in the late 1970s. It is now governed by two patron Bishops, the Catholic Bishop of Plymouth and the Anglican Bishop of Exeter, and the governing body of sixteen members includes four Bishops governors, two Catholic and two Anglican. According to the school's articles, governors are required to support the foundation of the school and staff must share a commitment towards the Christian ethos of the school.

Growing from around 220 pupils in 1992, the school now stands at 610, which is considered a maximum because of the size of the catchment area and the infrastructure. The school is selective and has often refused to enrol children with poor academic or disciplinary records. The ecumenical Christian ethos is seen as a selling point for attracting international pupils. As the head stated, 'a lot of children choose this school from overseas because we are a Christian School. Protestants or Catholics, it doesn't matter because we have this joint foundation, because we have a Christian foundation.'

From its inception, fee-paying parents have funded the school. The school gets a small amount of state funding for nursery provision and for children with a statement of educational needs, and some of the boarders who are sons or daughters of members of the armed forces get a 'boarders allowance'. In addition, the school also provides bursaries and scholarships to the tune of about ten percent of their income (i.e., £550,000 is spent on scholarships and



The Chapel in the joint Catholic and Anglican foundation school in Devon (Case Study 2).

bursaries). The school feels there is quite a broad socio-economic balance to the intake and 'tries very hard as a charity to widen that via the bursary scheme'.

The head admitted quite freely that originally there was an ecumenical motive behind the setting up of the school although he stressed that differences are not ignored or glossed over, 'I think if you look at our mission statement it says that there's a Catholic and Anglican foundation in the principles that make up school life, so we try to look at the common ground in terms of the Catholic and Anglican tradition and focus on the common areas there'. At the same time, the head noted that, when it came to teaching children health education, and in particular ethical issues such as contraception and abortion, the school did distinguish between what a Roman Catholic might believe as opposed to an Anglican.' He also stressed however, that preference was given to neither tradition. In keeping with GCSE requirements, for example, Christianity was taught as a world religion alongside other faiths.

It is worth noting that gender was also an important factor in the planning of the school and the motivation behind it. The change from a girls school to co-educational status featured heavily in the rationale for the new school, and, in particular, the need to move away from a 'lady-like' education.

The school has two chaplains, an Anglican (female priest) and a Catholic priest, both of whom perform their own

denominational services as well as, occasionally, ecumenical services. A joint Carol Service is another example of shared worship and there is a Mass or Eucharist every term, although the two services are conducted separately and it is a voluntary Mass or Eucharist.

Governors and parents often attend the termly Mass or Eucharist. The Harvest festival is normally held in the local Anglican Church (because it's larger than the Catholic Church) 'but there are possibilities of developing greater use of the Roman Catholic Church in town.'

Year assemblies are taken by a member of staff, at senior level. Restricted by the size of the chapel, there are two Key Stage 3 assemblies, two Key Stage 4 assemblies, and then one sixth form assembly. The assemblies are either in the morning or at lunch time in the chapel. If there is no main chapel assembly on a given day, students have a short 'reflection for the day', led by a form tutor, as expected of a church school.

It was noted that there were Catholic images such as statues of the Sacred Heart, statues of icons and pictures of the Virgin Mary displayed prominently throughout the building. In light of the problems encountered in the Scottish shared campus schools, the head was asked if these icons did not raise concern from any member of the Anglican faith. The answer was unexpected: 'No, if anything when the Roman Catholic advisors have been around they thought they were maybe outdated and [asked] should we keep them?' Overall, though, the head thought that 'if you ask anyone at the school they feel it's part of the history and therefore there's been no rush to get rid of them.'

When asked to consider what extra or added value being not simply a Christian school, but being a joint-faith school has given them, the head replied in terms of ethos, atmosphere and academic achievement, although without making any specific causal link between these factors. The head argued that the ethos of a joint-faith school was a means of overcoming past prejudices and cultural barriers, and of inculcating Christian principles and values such as faith, hope and charity. He also claimed that the ethos helped pupils to feel more confident and that it had encouraged them to be kind and loving toward one another. 'I'd like to think that very confident young people who achieve not only academically but in a whole range of areas, and value added schools from key stage 2 to key stage 4, we normally rank in the top 5% in the country and a lot of our parents say the school has something which is quite unique – an atmosphere, a family atmosphere, very supportive on the pastoral front, a lot of personal attention. Children are very happy here, you'll see a lot of smiling faces, we tend to satisfy, and children like to come back.'

It is worth noting that the head also pointed to other features, including the aesthetics of the building, which he felt added something 'unique' to the ecumenical ethos of the school.

As with the joint foundation school in Taunton, this school has church inspections from both the Anglican and Catholic diocese. Whereas the Roman Catholic approach tends to be advisory in comparison to the more structured Anglican approach, both are more about issues of pastoral care and the curriculum, looking at religious provision all the way through the school, from curriculum delivery, to staffing and other resource issues. The inspections are also concerned to ensure that the school is 'delivering an up-to-date curriculum that's relevant to our foundation and they look closely at religious acts of worship and pastoral care and give guidance on that.' While there is an induction process for all staff, the head admitted that there was room for improvement. Nevertheless, the school appeared to be well prepared. The head of Religious Education is an Anglican, but is also a Catholic-trained and approved schools inspector.

One of the most notable features of the school is the respect and even deference given by the head to the parents who are also school governors. Indeed, the active involvement of parents is seen as a key strength. 'While I might have been apprehensive about that concept years ago, in fact I've found that it works very well because the governors we've got are intelligent, responsible, sensible people who actually give very good guidance, advice and support, as well as encouragement.'

It is not unreasonable to assume, given the list of very high ranking professional positions these parent governors held, that the socio-economic status of these parents is a crucial factor in explaining the schools success. It was also freely acknowledged by the head that a fee-paying school completely changes the relationship and attitude of the school to the parents, 'the fact is that they're customers, really. They're clients and you've got to keep them happy. If you don't have happy parents then they'll withdraw their children or they will make sure they'll let others know.' The contrast between this school and the first case study, in terms of the social composition of its children, and virtually no parental involvement, could hardly have been greater.

When asked to give the reasons for their success as a joint-faith school, and, if there was any advice he would offer to anyone considering a similar new joint church venture, the head thought the key was the involvement of committed Christian parents: 'I think basically you had a group of committed Christians of either tradition who got together and thought "can we not run a joint-faith school" and ...

you have the traditions coming together to produce a school that's going to be different and new, it's going to be co-educational, ecumenical, and you have a good committed core, and they brought in the Bishops on our side and got their support.' When it was suggested that it is often hard to know what comes first when a parent chooses a school – its ethos or its academic attainment – the head was unequivocal: 'The fact is, we did a survey amongst parents. Seventy five percent of parents said the Christian ethos was one of the reasons they chose the school, as a major factor. I've even had a Sikh father send his children here because as Sikhs they'd have good ethics.'

Case study three - Torbay

This is a post-primary (11-18 years) co-educational comprehensive school in Torbay and was the first joint Catholic and Anglican comprehensive in Britain. The head teacher and the head of Religious Education were interviewed together. The governance of the school consists of an equal representation from both the Catholic and Anglican diocese, with four foundation governors from both dioceses (these can either be clergy or lay). There are also two parent-governors and local authority and staff-governors.

The school has an enrolment of approximately 1,100 pupils and is quite heavily oversubscribed. The local context and the joint church nature contribute to the fact that there is a high demand for available places. When asked to speculate on their oversubscription, the head thought it was partly because of the faith element but also down to a number of other contributing factors, including the perceived educational standards of the competition in the area. The school has a good reputation because it is seen as a traditional institution in terms of discipline and having a compulsory school uniform. Torbay still has the eleven-plus, such that, as the head put it, 'if you're a parent in Torbay and you know your child is not highly academic we're seen as the ... [next best thing].' In terms of academic achievement, the head also observed that their ability range doesn't follow the national distribution curve, in that they have fewer numbers in the most able bracket, a higher number in the middle ability range and about the same number of the weakest children.

The school opened in 1962 as a Catholic post-primary school and in 1974 became the first joint school within the state sector. The Sixth Form was opened in 1997. The original school was small, with a roll of about 400. It was quickly realised that the school would not remain viable unless it grew sufficiently to provide a broad enough curriculum. Consequently, the then Headmaster started to explore whether the school could grow in size by including



Pupils participating in a joint service in the jointly managed Catholic and Anglican post-primary school in Torbay (Case Study 3).

Anglicans as well, and worked to get Bishops from both dioceses – the Catholic Diocese of Plymouth and the Church of England Diocese in Exeter – on board. Initially, the balance was roughly 80:20 Catholic:Anglican, but proportions have changed for various demographic reasons. In September 2008, the head noted, the school would be changing its admissions criteria, 'so that we have 45 per cent Roman Catholic, 45 per cent Anglican and 10 percent of Christians from other denominations, affiliated Churches'.

According to the head of Religious Education at the school, 'We're not an ecumenical school ... we're a joint church school with ecumenical aims and values but we are a joint denominational school.' By way of explanation, the head of Religious Education went on to say, 'I think the fact that they were able to join together in the 70s was due to the fact that in Torbay at the time the Anglican Church was, and still is to a certain extent, High Anglican, so certainly at the time there was a lot of similarity and commonality between the Catholic faith and the Anglican faith in Torbay.' The head teacher concurred, 'I think there was a stronger drive towards an ecumenical school in the beginning as perhaps there is now.'

The school has a mission statement which the head of Religious Education could not recall word for word, but interestingly remarked that it 'was actually written by a year 11 student, about providing a caring environment where gospel values are at the heart, a place where learners

feel safe and everyone's valued'. The school motto, or 'tagline' as it was called, was easier to recall, 'Christ is our cornerstone, learning is our focus'. In trying to define how, as a joint-faith school, it is different to, say, another single faith Christian school, the head thought that there was 'a greater understanding on the part of staff and students about the belief and practice of people from the other denomination'. Likewise, the head of Religious Education felt that 'the children who've just been in a Catholic school don't really have an idea about what it is that Anglicans do.' They both considered that stand alone Catholic schools and Catholic Education 'can be dominated by... events, activities, practice... along the liturgical year... but even more than that, it's punctuated by prayer here and prayer there and so forth and there is not that dominance of practice here.'

When it was suggested to them that there was a possibility that some Catholic parents, if not the priests or bishop or diocese, might be concerned about maintaining Catholic identity or Catholic ethos in that kind of environment, the head of Religious Education saw this issue as a challenge and offered a strongly expressed personal opinion based on her experiences over fifteen years at the school:

A lot of schools now transfer from Roman Catholic to become joint denominational or ecumenical. If they're going that way, they have to be aware that that's a challenge ... it's not some sort of fudge of broadly Christian woolly "let's all care and share". We actually have to ensure as best we can that for Roman Catholic parents who send their children to school they will get a Roman Catholic education and Anglican parents will get an Anglican education and when it matters and when it is appropriate that you don't deliver some sort of diluted fudge. We emphasise what we share, what we have in common, that commonality, we emphasise what we have together. But we mustn't push under the carpet those things that divide us... We're pilgrims together walking along the same road and we have so much in common. But there are things that divide us.

The head teacher and head of Religious Education could only recall one incident in over 15 years where there was tension between the Anglican and the Catholic clergy, although this was qualified as a division over practice, and not a conflict over ethos because 'there's never been any conflict on ethos because I think they share a very strong vision and mission for the school.' The division occurred because a Catholic chaplain said he was uncomfortable because he had children coming to a mass that he was celebrating when he felt that many of them did not really know what it was all about. Outside school some children do not attend mass and he put forward the idea that children

should not be forced to come to mass, that it should be a matter of election. Against this view, the Anglican chaplain was happy to have all the pupils there even if some of them did not really understand; he wanted the children to come to their own choice even if they did not understand very much of what was going on. This matter did go to the Bishops who emphasised that it was a parental responsibility for young people to fulfil their obligations on attending mass on Holy Days, and it would be more appropriate for the school to offer the opportunity, but not to necessarily compel people.

The school has daily acts of worship, the majority of which are Christian acts of worship, but not Eucharistic. Every now and then, however, the school also holds services attended by all the children, both Catholic and Anglican: for example, if it is a Catholic Mass, the Anglican priest comes along and gives communion to the Anglican children.

The fact that it is a joint faith school does affect the way that religious education is taught along with staff recruitment. As is the norm, the religious education curriculum is locally agreed and hence differs from local education authorities elsewhere. According to the head of Religious Education, the challenge here is 'to put a religious education curriculum together that satisfies both of those dioceses – it satisfies the Roman Catholic Diocese that has me teach "X" and the Anglican Diocese that says "teach Y"'. This was done by keeping representatives of both diocese informed at all times, emailing resources and materials for consultation and approval and negotiating a customised programme keeping both traditions on side. She added that 'there is a very good working relationship between the staff in both dioceses, the educational staff – they know each other well, they meet on a regular basis, they meet with the local authority and they also sit on the same committees.' Overall, it was stressed that the key to navigating potential division was to focus on what unites, what is held in common, and 'then when there are differences, not only just being honest about them but providing opportunities for both sides to feel fully serviced.'

When it was noted that there were crucifixes on many walls in the school, and that this raised the question whether these would be seen as Catholic symbols, the head teacher responded that this was not a problem, since Church of England primary schools would normally have crucifixes in their rooms. When she added that 'the Virgin Mary could be a little bit of an issue for some people', the head of Religious Education quickly intervened and said this highlighted a typical misunderstanding, since the Virgin Mary was not peculiarly Catholic. She went on to stress not just overlaps between religious practices, but also room

for flexibility, for example, with respect to making or not making the sign of the cross.

Being a joint faith school allowed the head of Religious Education an element of discretion to adapt and compile the religious education syllabus, but again only using the overarching ideas from the Bishops' conference and the agreed syllabus. For example, 'at GCSE we are not in line with the locally agreed syllabus because at Key Stage 4 you have to study two world religions – Christianity and another – whereas we offer a purely Christian GCSE course'. With regard to conflicting ethical issues, the differences are dealt with explicitly, because 'that's what they're required to know – they'd be asked things like "Explaining why there are different views on abortion within Christianity" so they'd say "Roman Catholics believe this because..."', "Anglicans believe this because..."', "Free Church Christians believe this because...". So it's their learning objective to understand the breadth of Christian thinking and where those views come from.'

According to the head, there is regular consultation with parents. In fact, the school is required to consult with parents, not least because it forms part of their OFSTED inspection. This requires knowing how the school consults with parents over a wide range of issues, and the joint denominational ethos of the school is just one of the many issues covered. Consultation is generally done through questionnaires – for example, parents were involved in the reworking of the school's anti-bullying policy. There is also a very active PTA, with parents engaged in, among other things, fund raising. Some governors are also parents of children who attend the school.

When prompted to suggest any lessons for any other school considering joint denominational status, the head teacher said: 'I think the biggest thing is that you focus on what you share, not your differences... and you must trust... you have got to be honest and fair to both traditions.'

Ethos is an issue pertinent when it comes to recruitment. All staff have some training and they do have resources provided, but it was admitted that this can be a problem in recruitment. For instance, it is not simply a matter of employing the best science teacher available, but also one who will adhere to the Christian ethos very strongly and hence who will feel comfortable with doing and organising acts of worship.

Nevertheless, the head said that she was liberal on the issue of recruitment. She accepted that, in the normal course of events, many people are not religious believers or had reservations about religion. The school employs not just

Christians but also some Muslims. From her perspective, the crucial point is not so much what one believed but whether one was honest in one's convictions. It should be said, however, that the head of Religious Education qualified this significantly when she added that recruitment and suitability to lead acts of worship was 'about being consistent with the ethos of the school.' As such, she found it hard to see why a non-believer would want to teach in a joint Roman Catholic and Anglican school. Somewhat surprisingly, given her earlier comments, this led the head teacher to rejoin the discussion, saying that 'we can't appoint someone like that ... I think it's just a sensitivity to... the ethos'.

Case study four – Laois, Ireland

The school opened in County Laois, Ireland, in September 2005. It is doubly unique in that not only is it the only dual-denominational school in Ireland – Church of Ireland and Catholic – but also an Irish medium school or 'Gaelscoil'. Starting with ten pupils on opening day, there are now twenty-eight pupils aged between 4 and 12 who are taught in composite classes. The internal running of the school is the responsibility of the Principal and the teachers in the school. The management of the school is overseen by a Board of Management made up of the Principal, one of the teachers, a representative from each bishop, two representatives from the parents and two representatives from the wider community.

The Principal recalled that both bishops were involved at the start, 'we had an occasion here during the first year where both bishops came and we had a tree-planting ceremony, and we planted a tree for each child who began school at that time... you'll notice that there are 10 oak trees. It was well supported – not just by the school or the parents but also by the wider community.'

The origins of the school date back over twenty years when the local (state) Catholic primary school closed – numbers were falling and at the time it was more popular to bus children to larger towns, which would be at least 4 or 5 miles away. This resulted in a loss of community spirit, which parents sought to recapture by again having a local school in their village.

The parents were instrumental in opting for a Gaelscoil. They realised that a school which teaches through the medium of Irish would get more assistance from the Department of Education. As the Principal explained, 'when you're opening a Gaelscoil, you actually have more leverage with the Department of Education... and you also get support from a group called Gaelscoileanna.' The decision to create a dual-denominational school was also



The first dual-denominational Gaelscoil in Ireland (Case Study 4).

driven by pragmatic considerations of much the same sort. Just as Catholic children from the village were being bussed to neighbouring towns, the children of one local Church of Ireland family were also having to travel for their schooling. These considerations persuaded the Department of Education to open a school that, given its small enrolment and resulting economies of scale, might otherwise never have opened.

In many ways religious education is the same in this school as any other state/Catholic primary in the Republic of Ireland. Every day from 12:00 until 12:30 religion is taught, as laid down by the national curriculum for religious education (i.e., two and a half hours per week). But according to the Principal, ‘what you find is that both religions are so similar that there is very little need to have two different books.’

As children go up in age however, there are more fundamental differences, especially with the sacraments, not only theologically but in age—for example, Catholic pupils make their first communion in second class (aged seven or eight) whereas the Church of Ireland do not take the same sacrament until sixth class (aged twelve or thirteen). Differences of this sort are explained to the children in order that they might better understand the other religious tradition.

For the Principal, the celebration of Catholic Holy Communion actually provides an opportunity to develop what arguably amounts to an integrationist, if not ecumenical, approach. At the first communion for example:

The children from the Church of Ireland, they have come, they have sang in the choir, they’ve said prayers, they’ve brought up gifts, they’ve been very much integrated with it, and we can be thankful for that family

because they’re open enough to do that. They’re probably the first family in this area who have left the Church of Ireland school to come to the Catholic school. Now we have a few more names down the line, and, please God we’ll see this work, because there’s room for all of us to work together – it’s not that one is trying to beat the other down, there’s room for all of us to work together and get rid of all of these notions we have, what we think being a Protestant is, what we think being a Bible-bashing Catholic is – there’s room for all of us to integrate.

Understood in this way integration is clearly not a pejorative term or a form of engagement which should be feared. It should be stressed, however, that this is how the Principal understands the term and so it does not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the respective Catholic and Church of Ireland dioceses.

When the Principal was asked whether there were concerns from the Catholic Bishops or the local Catholic priest on the way religion is taught—and in particular whether there were concerns that the Catholic education in dual-denominational context would in any sense be diluted—she was adamant that there were no such concerns. The Bishop and his Secretary are helpful and supportive, as is the local Church of Ireland Rector.

When asked to define the ethos of the school, the Principal argued that the ethos of a school ‘is what goes on inside the school, not a piece of paper in a frame up on the wall, and it’s how the school is run ... and the one thing that we do impress upon the children is to treat each other as they would like to be treated, and that is the ethos of the school... it’s a Christian ethos.’

The Principal stated that any important policies the school has (for example, the anti-bullying policy or the enrolment policy) are all run by the parents to make sure that they are happy with them. Therefore, if these policies are challenged and a parent says they are not happy with it, ‘then we can say “well, we ran it by you...” so it’s in your own interest to include parents.’ It has to be noted, however, that the very small number of children – and parents – at the school make it much easier to allow for a greater consultation with parents.

Finally, looking forward to future enrolments and the next school year starting in September 2008, the Principal was asked if the projected numbers were positive. Unlike in Northern Ireland however, where future viability of such small schools (typically integrated or Irish Medium) is crucially dependent on making incremental numerical targets, there are no such pressures on this Principal. ‘I

don't give too much emphasis to projected numbers. I know people have called me and asked to reserve a place for their child and I'll certainly do that, but... in the Republic, once there are less than 60 children in the school you get the same capitation grant as you would for 60 so it doesn't really bother us here.'

Yet attendance for the sake of numbers did not appeal either. The Principal seemed interested only in families that were committed to the ethos and language of the school: 'You can have children but you have to have children whose parents are interested in Irish. You can fill the school, that's not a problem. But you want to fill it with people who are going to do the school justice and who the school will do justice to. It's a two-way thing.'

Lessons for Northern Ireland

1. Dual-denominational schools can be an appropriate, viable response to falling enrolments. Despite some tremendous differences (including differences in origin, rationale, resources, student profile, and so forth), this is true to one extent or another of the four case studies which this project considered.
2. In the case of any such proposed schools for Northern Ireland, a key imperative is gaining the support of the bishops from the outset. Once that support is gained, it needs to be kept.
3. It is possible to create an overarching Christian ethos that is compatible with respect for difference between Christian traditions. However, while commonality need to be celebrated, so, too, do differences. Here there will inevitably a need for ongoing dialogue, trust, honesty, and no small degree of flexibility. When successful, fears about the dilution of one religion or the other need not materialise.
4. Conflicts about images and iconography in schools are not inevitable. Indeed, differences of this sort are often overplayed or badly understood. Images and iconography need to be respected, but need not be treated in a doctrinaire fashion.
5. Alongside support from the Churches, parental involvement is also deemed important. Although it can be hard to get parents involved, they can help not to shape school policy, but also to legitimate school policy (e.g., in areas such as anti-bullying).
6. Much depends on the context. For example, joint denominational schools in affluent areas may succeed very well in developing a specially Christian ethos, in celebrating religious differences, and in achieving high levels of academic attainment. By contrast, joint denominational schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation may be faced with very different social challenges.
7. Any potential joint managed church schools or dual-denominational school should try to develop a clear motto or mission statement encapsulating an agreed-upon a common Christian ethos.
8. Joint denominational schools can have a role to play in matters of conflict resolution.

Notes

- 1 The Foyle Trust for Integrated Education (2007) *Joint Protestant-Roman Catholic Schools, Colleges and Universities: International Directory 2007*, Available at <http://www.nicie.org/archive/international%20directory%2004.pdf>
- 2 Ibid.

Multi-denominational Schools in Ireland

Background and methodology

In 2006-2007 (the latest year for which there are official statistics) there were a total of 3,160 state funded primary schools in Ireland, educating over 450,000 children at a cost of almost €3 billion per annum.¹ Although children are not obliged to attend first level schools (also called national or primary schools) until the age of six, almost all begin school in the September following their fourth birthday.² Pupils attend primary school for eight years compared to seven in Northern Ireland. And most children finish their primary education at age twelve.

The structure and administration of the Irish school system dates back to 1831 and the 'Stanley Letter', written in that year by the then Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Stanley to the Duke of Leinster inviting him to become the chairman of a new Board of Commissioners for National Education. Like Lord Londonderry's later ideal in the early 1920s to educate Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland under one system, national schools in 1831 were originally intended to be mixed religion and to 'unite in one system children of different creeds.'³ This did not happen however, and as a consequence, the majority of schools are today managed by religious denominations and privately owned, albeit funded by the state and required to deliver a common curriculum. By 2006/7 there were nearly 3,000 Catholic primary schools, some 92 per cent of the schools estate with the next largest provider, the Church of Ireland

with 182 schools accounting for 6 per cent, and the rest of the schools under the patronage of a variety of smaller Christian, non-Christian and other providers.

In addition to denominational education Ireland also has a small but growing number of multi-denominational schools. The first of these opened in 1978 in response to demands made by a group of parents. By 2007 the number of multi-denominational schools under the formal patronage of Educate Together had grown to 44 with just under 9,000 pupils.⁴ The current demand exceeds supply so much so that on 24 April 2008, the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD, gave this patron organisation approval to establish 12 new schools. Even this significant increase in provision (up to 56 schools and at least 10,000 pupils in September 2008) will not, however, meet the volume of enrolment requests. One school examined for this project, for example, had a capacity of 217 pupils, and yet there were 170 children on the waiting list for only 27 available places. Of those 27 places to be allocated in September 2008, 18 children are siblings of pupils already at the school and 6 are deferred entries. For reasons such as this Educate Together expect to become the second largest sector by pupil numbers by 2011.

Our project sought to find out more about Ireland's multi-denominational schools. To do so consideration was given to the policy documents and literature of the patron

Figure 19: Number of national schools and pupils by religious denomination 2006-2007⁵

Religious Denomination	Number of National Schools	Number of Pupils
Catholic	2908	440517
Church of Ireland	182	13911
Presbyterian	14	662
Methodist	1	96
Jewish	1	94
Inter denominational	5	635
Muslim	2	435
Multi denominational	46	8569
Other/Unknown	1	22
Total	3160	464941

organisation, Educate Together. Secondly, a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with the Chief Executive Officer of Educate Together and the head teachers of three schools. As with the shared campus arrangements in North Lanarkshire and the jointly managed church schools, the broad objectives of the analysis were to consider:

1. How and why the schools started
2. What principles and rationale underlie their ethos
3. Advantages and disadvantages of the approach.

The head teachers and their respective schools will be referred to numerically from one to three in the order in which they were interviewed. School one is located in the southwest inner-city of Dublin and was opened in September 1994 with 11 pupils and one teacher. It now has 217 pupils, 8 classroom teachers and 4 special needs assistants. School two is located on the north side of County Dublin in a village that has expanded enormously in the last twenty years with new housing developments. It opened in September 2002 with 31 pupils and 2 teachers, just 2 years after a local parent put a notice up in the supermarket asking if anyone was interested in setting up a multi-denominational school in the area. Currently there are 335 pupils and a staff of 28 including 17 teachers. School three is located in County Wicklow, just south of Dublin, it opened in September 1981 with 71 pupils and 2 teachers. The founding head teacher is still in office with 12 classroom teachers and 4 special needs assistants. The current enrolment of the school is 232.

The importance of context

While the number of multi-denominational schools is undoubtedly increasing, it should be noted that primary education in Ireland is generally experiencing extraordinary growth. According to the Chief Executive of Educate Together, government projections indicate that 'there will be a 22 percent increase in the next 6 years, this will mean 100,000 additional students in the system, and the primary school population will rise to 550,000, the equivalent of 7,300 additional classrooms.' Ongoing demographic increases have stretched the Irish education system. Indeed, the issue of available schools places has in some areas become matter of some critical concern. For example, in Balbriggan and Lucan (both in County Dublin), new multi-denominational schools had to open in September 2007 under emergency circumstances when it became apparent that the existing schools in the area did not have the spare capacity required to facilitate the number of children due to enrol.

The Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Diarmuid Martin, has laid the blame for these circumstances on the Department of Education. In his opinion the state was responsible because it has not established its own management structure for primary schools and as consequence was unable to respond to a situation that could have been predicted. In Ireland the Department of Education has historically not planned for school development, whereas the Catholic church by comparison has provided 'Catholic schools for Catholic parents'. The Archbishop has been forthright in arguing that 'if there are others who are left without schools they should not blame us.' He has also maintained that the church would 'be very happy to see a plurality of patronage and providers of education. I have no ambition to run the entire education system in Dublin.'⁶

Based upon their own research, the Chief Executive of Educate Together argued, 'We're fairly confident that in any given area of the country where there is a housing estate, if there is an equal choice presented to parents there will be roughly a 60:40 percent balance between those who would choose a Catholic school and an Educate Together school for their children.' The willingness to contemplate that this may indeed be the case, has been echoed in comments made by the Archbishop of Dublin in which the idea of 'divesting current Catholic schools' where there was no demand for Catholic education has been suggested. 'Take an area where there are five schools . . . in consultation with parents and teachers, you could rationalise that and ensure you have a sufficient number of schools for Catholics and other patrons.'⁷ In December 2007 the Archbishop repeated his view that Catholic education is over-represented in the management of the national school system.⁸

The Chief Executive of Educate Together agreed with the Archbishop's analysis and made it clear that he too apportioned blame upon the state: 'Catholic schools and their enrolment policies are not the cause of school place shortages. Neither are they the cause of religious discrimination in the system as a whole. Faith-based schools may lawfully prefer those of their religion when taking enrolments. It is appropriate that parents may chose such a school if this is their preference . . . what is unacceptable is that in most areas of the country there is no choice... This lack of choice is the State's responsibility.'⁹ He continued to argue that it is a fundamental injustice to maintain a publicly funded faith-based education system, to which an increasing number of parents are compelled to send their children, often against their conscience or religious beliefs, because there is no available alternative.

Moreover, he maintained that ‘it is particularly unacceptable that children baptized in a particular faith have priority in accessing state-funded education’. With some 6 percent of primary schools also under the patronage of the Church of Ireland, 98 percent of parents of children have no option but to seek entry to church-run schools.

The deficiency of educational choice in Ireland for those of a minority religious background is exacerbated by an increasingly diverse society. The Irish National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) revealed in 2007, that in from 2002 to 2006 the Muslim community had grown by 70 percent from 19,100 to 32,500, and over the same period the Orthodox Christian community had doubled from 10,400 to 20,800. While some 92 percent of Irish nationals living in Ireland were Catholic, just 51 percent of non-Irish nationals considered themselves as Catholic.¹⁰ Having said this, Educate Together argues that it would be a reductive analysis to attribute the growth of multi-denominational schools to inward migration alone. In fact, it appears that the success of the movement is explained not so much by exogenous factors, but by endogenous ones, and in particular the increase of secularism. ‘The vast majority of immigrants in the census figures identify themselves as Roman Catholic in their identity, and yet, overall, the percentage of those people describing themselves as Roman Catholic in the population as a whole is declining.’ This view was supported by the head teachers of the schools, with one interviewee in particular arguing that ‘schools tend to be slow in reflecting the changes in society, because by nature they’re concern as organisations is in conserving knowledge... but slowly, I think things are changing, because the society has changed radically.’

What is different in a multi-denominational school?

Educate Together argues that there are four principles which make Ireland’s multi-denominational schools different:

1. All children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds are equally respected
2. They are co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities
3. They are child centred in their approach to education
4. They are democratic and encourage the active participation of parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of teachers.¹¹

The boards of management of all multi-denominational schools are required to uphold these principles. They are seen not only a mission statement, but as commitments for which schools are to be held to account.¹² The Chief Executive of Educate Together was unambiguous in pointing out that multi-denominational schools have not just a moral or ethical responsibility, but are actually legally required ‘to provide an environment in which all identities are guaranteed active support and equality, and [must] provide an educational curriculum which informs and allows children to explore all the main faith systems in the world’. At the same time it was recognised that this approach places ‘the main responsibility for religious formation on the family.’ While religious instruction takes place outside the compulsory school day, multi-denominational schools do facilitate religious instruction as an additional or extra-curricular activity. Indeed, the openness of the school to enable children to be instructed in their own faith is accepted as a critical ‘balancing of where the responsibilities lie’.

Unlike the Catholic triangular support structure of faith formation (home, parish, school) in multi-denominational schools the responsibility for a religious instruction of children is assumed to be that of the family and religious organisations. The school plays no part in this, since it considers the primary responsibility of teachers and staff to be limited to the provision of ‘a safe, caring and respectful environment for all children.’¹³ This approach helps to explain why Ireland’s multi-denominational schools also differentiate themselves from republican education models. ‘The French model of the strict separation of education and religion, in our view... and similarly the American situation as well... doesn’t create this critical environment, positive critical environment in which people can interact and learn and become comfortable with that respectable interaction between ... different faiths.’

All schools in Ireland have to teach half an hour of religious studies every day. But in multi-denominational schools this statutory requirement is met by what is called the Ethical Education Curriculum (EEC).¹⁴ Rather than instruction or indoctrination in a particular faith, the EEC ‘is intended to support schools in the task of developing... programmes which reflect the four key principles [listed above] and recognise the moral and spiritual dimensions of children’s growth and development’.¹⁵ Originally conceived in the 1980s, the EEC has been refined over a 15 year period, with the most recent version published in 2004 outlining a framework for delivery, the philosophical rationale and the theoretical underpinnings of the programme.¹⁶ The EEC is divided into four strands:



Reproduced courtesy of Educate Together

Casaheany Educate Together National School, Dublin, moved into a new purpose built building in June 2008.

1. Moral and Spiritual Development
2. Justice and Equality
3. Belief Systems
4. Ethics and the Environment

Each one of these strands has a series of prescribed learning outcomes and takes two years to complete. The content is also divided into four age ranges, junior and senior infants (ages 4-6), first and second class (ages 6-8), third and fourth class (ages 8-10) and fifth and sixth class (ages 10-12). The programme becomes progressively reflective and encourages critical analysis by the pupils as they progress through the various year groups.

It was noticeable that although all of the head teachers from multi-denominational schools interviewed for this project agreed that there was 'no religion in the school', examination of major world faiths in the Belief Systems strand of the EEC was not considered 'religious education'. This opinion was clarified by making the simple and valid distinction between doctrinal or confessional education, 'teaching the faith' compared to 'teaching about faiths'. Although the schools teach pupils about a diversity of religions, including 'Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism and Humanism' it appears, on close examination, the content of the ethical curriculum is heavily influenced by and affords a position of primacy to

humanism. The Chief Executive of Educate Together made this point succinctly: 'to be perfectly honest, it is humanistic in the sense that it is rights-based and it is fundamentally [premised] on the concepts which we think will enable young people to interact positively with themselves, their families, their communities and the world'.

In practice it seems that claiming the EEC is a multi-denominational approach could be contested. A confusion or lack of clarity in the EEC between normative and meta-ethical questions is apparent. Normative ethics refers to any system of ethics dictating morally correct conduct, it is prescriptive and evaluative in nature, it is concerned with 'ought' questions. This is distinguished from meta-ethics which is descriptive only, and concerned narrowly with the discussion of the meanings of moral terms without issuing commands. The EEC is intended to be meta-ethical, and yet by adopting a humanist framework there is a clear risk of endorsing a particular set of beliefs and affording them a position of primacy. Since humanism is itself studied as a discrete element of the Belief Systems strand of the EEC it seems unbalanced to use that ontology as a lens through which to examine other religions.

Setting aside this theoretical internal contradiction within the EEC, there is undoubtedly a conscious attempt in multi-denominational schools to balance the respect for individual

faiths with the recognition of diversity, by not prioritising a particular religious tradition within the ethos of the school. This strongly contrasts for example, with the integrated education movement in Northern Ireland, whose schools are ‘essentially Christian in character’, and which try to be as inclusive as possible for those of other or no faith. Indeed, it could reasonably be argued that by deliberately not prioritising Christianity Ireland’s multi-denominational schools are actually much closer to integration in practice than their Northern equivalents.

One of the mottos from the first multi-denominational school (still used across the movement today) is the expression ‘No child an outsider’. This aspect was emphasised by the head teacher from the second school interviewed for this project who said, ‘what multi-denominational education means to me is that we welcome children of all faiths and non, and no matter what faith or “no faith” you have, you’re going to get an equal access to the school, you’re going to be equally celebrated with everybody else, you’re not going to feel left out’. Once again, in comparison to integrated schools in Northern Ireland, the logic here is that if a school were ‘essentially Christian in character’ then the danger would be that the non-Christian children may be put in a position, even if handled sensitively and with due consideration, of feeling like outsiders. Whether this actually ever occurs in integrated schools in Northern Ireland may be strongly denied, but it does not detract from this distinction.¹⁷

By virtue of the fact they have been set up by local parents in a volunteer capacity, multi-denominational schools are often imbued with a high sense of democratic participation. Although this may help explain the success of the schools, and is actively encouraged, it is also not without difficulties. Significant debate has taken place, for example, on the scope and boundaries between the respective roles of parents and teachers. In fact, it was deliberation on this very issue that led to the only amendment made to the *Educate Together Charter*, when in 1999, the phrase ‘democratically run with due regard however for the professional role of the teacher’ was replaced with ‘democratically run with active participation in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers’.¹⁸

The democratic character of multi-denominational schools is manifested in three ways. Firstly, by the position parents occupy in the structure, constitution and management of the schools. Secondly, by parents directly contributing to and helping to write aspects of the EEC. Thirdly, by providing conduits that enable pupils to become involved in decision making within the school.

Firstly, the structure of school management is important. All schools in Ireland have a patron and board of management (Governors). In Catholic schools the Patron is usually the Archbishop, in multi-denominational schools it is Educate Together as a company.¹⁹ The board of management has eight members comprising of the head teacher and a teachers representative, two patron nominees, two parent representatives (one male, one female) and two representatives from the wider community. The head teacher from the second school interviewed for this project who had previously worked for 22 years in Catholic schools reflected on the contrast in the style of governance between the two sectors:

In my experience of working on a board of one of the other schools and working on a board here is, I think we come to those boards as 8 people, all with their own opinions, and everything gets thrashed out very democratically. My experience of a board in a Catholic school is we arrived and you basically were rubber-stamping things – things weren’t particularly thrashed out and most decisions were taken by the Principal [head teacher] and the Chairperson, and the other members of the board nodded politely.

The interviewee accepted that this experience could not be applied universally, but nevertheless, maintained that a fundamental difference in multi-denominational schools is that ‘there [is] a very strong parental influence’.

The heavy balance of parents on the board of management of a school may seem to be a concern and potential source of conflict. But this did not appear to be the case in Ireland. One head teacher noted ‘it is fantastic because it means you’re not on your own making decisions – if the board make a decision it’s a shared decision between eight people and that’s very comforting’. In a Northern Ireland this high level of parental representation is similarly matched by many integrated schools, which often have a greater number of parents on their boards of governors than is the case with either the controlled or maintained schools. Increased parental involvement and consultation is not always conducive to easy decisions however. The head teacher of the second school admitted that in the early days in the life of the school when there were only thirty families it was very easy to consult, but recently for example, parents had been asked whether or not they wanted a school uniform: ‘now I have a 10 page document of very, very divergent views of whether we should have a uniform or whether we shouldn’t.’

Secondly, parental input into the creation of a schools ethos is crucial. The first head teacher interviewed for this project

provided an example of how parents had helped produce their own school version of the EEC. 'We have an Ethical sub-committee which meets once a month which myself and [name] are on, ... and other than that it's all parents, there's about 6 parents on it... they're very involved... and they devised that whole ethics programme.' When asked for examples of what is taught following the parents involvement informing the EEC, the head teacher replied, 'through the ethical core curriculum we've decided recently to concentrate on the equality and justice side – we've been looking at doing things like gender issues, abilities and disabilities, child labour, traveller issues, media studies – we've gone into media studies this year.' Perhaps because of greater parental involvement in this ethical programme, issues are covered in multi-denominational schools which are not typically addressed in Catholic schools, for example, the head teacher indicated that 'this year we've looked at gay rights as well – the sixth class [ages 11-12] are looking at gay rights, we're also hoping to have David Norris [a member of the Irish Senate, prominent media figure and Gay Rights campaigner] come to speak to us.'

Thirdly, child centred education is a priority for inclusion. When how pupils are involved in the school on head teacher replied, 'well I think we encourage children to speak out and be themselves ... we don't have a uniform, they can wear what they want, but we... well obviously I tell them to dress practically ... but I mean it's free expression... we encourage them to speak out, we encourage them to debate... we listen to them here.' When it was suggested that this may sound very liberal and might lead to a lack of discipline, the interviewee was quick to deny the assertion 'Oh, there is discipline, we've a very strict code of conduct, we have very strict regulations... every class has rules... you have to put up your hand, you have to respect other people, you have to listen to others... so it works both ways... we listen to what they're saying and... it's all very controlled, don't get me wrong, we have a very strong Code of Conduct here ... but at the same time they're free, they talk... if kids want to come and talk to me they knock on the door and they say "Hi [head teacher's first name]..." and they talk to me, they talk very openly to me ... there's no "Mrs [surname of head teacher]" or anything like that.' The school has a very active Student Council who are allowed to meaningfully participate in some major rules, discipline and behaviour issues.

Ethos and practice

As the policy documents of Educate Together clearly articulate, the contrast between respect and tolerance is a key theoretical underpinning of 'multi-denominational' schools (a term which Educate Together has always defined to include all denominations of all faiths). The schools are

committed to the idea that all religious backgrounds should be equally respected in the operation of the school, and perhaps uniquely, also 'included in this definition are humanist, agnostic and atheistic viewpoints and a generic concept of 'personal creed'.²⁰ The term 'respect' is carefully chosen, as they argue 'there is a distinction to be made between the concept of accommodation or tolerance of difference, with the concept of respect. Toleration and accommodation inherently imply that a majority view must make allowances for minority views and minorities must make requests to achieve this accommodation; respect implies care and equal treatment as of right.'²¹ An agreed understanding of these core normative ideals appears to define and determine the ethos of multi-denominational schools.

Educate Together maintains that their schools aim to create a 'culture *and practice* [emphasis added] in which the identity of every child is guaranteed active support.' How this support could be afforded to every individual child in a school given the diversity of their interests and backgrounds was not clear to us. Similarly, the underlying concept 'that human diversity enhances life, enriches cultures and provides huge educational resources for current and future generations', while an admirable sentiment, is simply stated rather than argued for or demonstrated. Many examples can be cited of what the recognition and celebration of multi-denominational identities means in practice. For example, on the issue of toleration, the second head teacher interviewed said that in five years since opening 'the school has grown from 30 to 330... and it started because a group of parents in the area... were looking for a school that would cater for their beliefs... I remember the first phrase that I got from parents at the time was that they wanted a school where their children would be celebrated, not tolerated.' This head teacher felt the experiences of her own children (who attended the school) were evidence, to her at least, that there was added value in attending a multi-denominational school. 'I brought my youngest child to school here just because domestically that suited, and I think she got a huge wealth of experience that the other two didn't get in a one-faith system.'

The Chief Executive of Educate Together repeatedly stressed that their movement had a fundamental legal obligation in that the schools should provide equality of access and esteem to children irrespective of their cultural, social or religious backgrounds. Much hangs, it seems, on the definition of multi-denominational, 'we have defined "multi-denominational" in a very broad concept of equality and respect, which is far beyond what is the strict dictionary definition of the term. Church of Ireland schools or Protestant schools in Ireland would describe themselves

as multi-denominational because their curriculum would cover both the Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist denominations of Protestantism, and that is perfectly valid use of the term... We [however] define multi-denominational as “all denominations of all faiths and none”... it is an equality and rights-based approach to education, rather than coming from an approach which is driven from religious considerations, or any other top-down kind of approach.’

These schools are not non-denominational as in Scotland (outside the Catholic sector), or bi-denominational or dual-denominational as with the joint Catholic/Anglican schools examined for this project, but rather, they are explicitly multi-denominational. As the first head teacher interviewed said, ‘we’re just basically giving information, as we see it. We’re not actually instructing them in any of these religions, we’re just giving them information.’ When asked what happens if parents want faith formation for their children, for example, Catholic sacramental preparation, this head teacher said ‘it’s nothing to do with us, it’s after school.’ Instruction can and is arranged via the school and takes place on the school premises with involvement of the local parish, but it has to be extra curricular. It could be argued that this is denial or avoidance of an extremely significant and formative religious experience for those children of a Catholic faith tradition, but the second head teacher interviewed explained how this was not at all avoidance, but was, in her view, a simple but crucial difference between multi-denominational and a non-denominational education. ‘We do discuss religion – all the time’. The interviewee developed this argument with a number of examples:

If a child has prepared for first Holy Communion they talk about it in class. We wish them good luck, they come in ... all dressed up in their finery and they’ll show off their photos. Likewise if a Jewish child has gone for a Bar mitzvah or something we will celebrate alongside them – if a child is Christened it’s talked about in class, so we would talk about the things that are happening in the children’s lives in relation to their faith. One of the things that would regularly come up here for us is that a child would come in and say “my granny is very sick, can we say a prayer for her?” and if you were in the Catholic school you’d stop and everybody would say a prayer for that granny. Here we would say, you know, “John’s granny is very sick, if anybody would like to say a prayer they can close their eyes and say a prayer. If you want you can send her good wishes...” we don’t lead the children in prayer, we don’t sort of instruct them in any way, but we don’t say “oh don’t mention prayer in here”.

When pressed for an illustration of how the multi-denominational approach worked in practice, the first head teacher interviewed also gave some vivid examples:

Let’s take Muslims... We’re not just about saying, grand, we accept that you can wear your Hijab – we talk about it, we talk about what it is, why are you wearing it, explain to us why you’re wearing it...we celebrate Ramadan, we celebrate Eid, we talk about it, we announce it in assembly, we sing Arabic songs, that’s what we mean by respect – it shows that we embrace it.

As examples of the inclusive ethos the interviewee referred the schools ‘Ethics Education Programme’ which listed celebrations and themed days which are celebrated, this included ‘Friendship day, Multi-cultural week, Chinese new year, “One World” Day and Winter celebration. It was suggested that themed days such as ‘Winter celebration’ may invite ridicule from critics that the multi-denominational approach leads to a shallow form of moral relativism with no firm foundations. Indeed, this potential criticism was highlighted by another head teacher who recalled that ‘one of our local priests [said] he didn’t agree with our “project”... his words were that we were “raising children in a moral vacuum”... it shocked me that any one faith would believe that they have the monopoly on morality, and we would in our moral and spiritual element, teach right from wrong, I mean honesty is honesty, no matter what belief system you have’.

As noted above, no doctrinal or religious instruction takes place in the multi-denominational schools. As the head teacher of the third school explained, ‘the building can be used by the various faith groups or parents groups who wish to do moral or specifically religious doctrine with their children ... there’s a group and the local Church provides that, but they do it outside school hours. We’ve phased out the in-school thing, so the children are educated together for the entire length of the school day’. When asked, the interviewee denied they were in any way non-religious or anti-religious. Rather, the school was understood to be concerned with not teaching that there is one true way, hence, the examination all the world religions. The head teacher then continued to provide an example of how the whole school was soon starting a four week project on Judaism:

At a senior level in the school the kids will be studying the origins of Judaism and the tenets of Judaism, the symbols of Judaism, and that might range down to an old Biblical story that might be dramatised by an infant class, but it would culminate in perhaps 4 weeks time in an assembly in the hall where we will, the children’s

artwork will be displayed in the hall and each class will give a performance whether it be from a parable from the Old Testament or an explanation of Bar Mitzvah from maybe some of the senior pupils in the school. ... the older children may visit the Synagogue and we certainly will have a Jewish speaker coming from the Synagogue to address the older children in the school.

The key aspect of this approach it seems is that as each religion is treated in turn and afforded the same time and space, none is afforded privilege. It is also claimed that in presenting religious faiths in this manner 'the human rights of teachers and other workers in the school are addressed, as staff are never placed in a position in which they may be required to put forward as religious truth a viewpoint that they may not themselves hold.'²²

Lessons for Northern Ireland

Despite their closer geographical proximity, perhaps less from the multi-denominational schools applies to Northern Ireland than from the shared campus or joint-foundation church models. The most salient observations are that:

1. Multi-denominational schools constitute a stand alone sector, and in this regard, unlike with shared campus schools or jointly managed church schools, there is no form of comparable structural partnership, shared governance or shared location or facilities which may offer lessons to Northern Ireland. Procedural matters, that is what is actually taught in terms of ethics and religion, are perhaps more relevant.
2. The significance of these schools lies in their genuinely inclusive ethos which obtains in practice through their own bespoke Ethical Education Curriculum (EEC) which replaces the daily half hour of RE which all other national primary schools must teach. In their philosophical rationale for multi-denominationalism they have drawn on respect, and not toleration, as a key principle and it is essentially a rights-based approach to education.
3. The strong emphasis and rhetoric on being 'democratically run' is less easily realised than with curricular matters. The extra places for parents in the governance of the school, parental contributions to the EEC and a strong consideration for the voice of pupils however, are all evidence of attempts to achieve this ideal within the management system.
4. A significant and direct comparison can be drawn between these multi-denominational schools and the formally integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The origins, motives and development of multi-denominational schools and integrated schools are very similar, their educational philosophy in terms of being co-educational and child centred, with higher parental presence in the governance structures, in being pro-actively open to all faiths and none, in publishing their own curricular resources to actively embrace and celebrate difference, are all directly comparable. The one significant difference, however, is that integrated schools in Northern Ireland are 'essentially Christian in character', while Educate Together schools are based on equality of treatment in principle and practice of different belief systems.
5. The demographics are completely different between the two jurisdictions. There is a huge demand for places in first level of education in Ireland and multi-denominational schools are particularly oversubscribed. To attribute their growth to demographics and immigration is mistaken, they started in the mid 1970s when demographics were falling and there was high emigration out of Ireland. The demand for their school model has come from within Ireland and is because of internal diversification. Having said this, the continuing demographic growth in Ireland is allowing the expansion of multi-denominational schools, while the reduction of the school aged population in Northern Ireland is constraining the growth of integrated schools. Clearly context is important.

Notes

- 1 Compiled using Department of Education and Science statistics available from http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/Key_stats_leaflet_05_06.pdf
- 2 This general background information on the structure of the Irish education system was drawn from <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?maincat=&pcategory=17216&ecategory=20658§ionpage=12251&language=EN&link=link001&page=1&doc=18626>
- 3 Lord Stanley, 1831, in Hyland and Milne, 1987, pp. 100-101.
- 4 According to the Department of Education there are 46 multi-denominational schools in Ireland in 2006/7. Educate Together are the patron body of 44. Any minor discrepancies between the figures quoted by the Department of Education and Science and Educate Together can be explained by the fact that under the heading 'multi-denominational' the Department probably include a small number of independent multi-denominational schools (previously private schools) and also about 4 Gaelscoileanna that are multi-denominational. Also figures quoted by the Department up to June 2008 still refer to 2006 and Educate Together quote their figures from 2007.
- 5 Information supplied directly to the authors by email from the Statistics Section of the Department of Education and Science, June 2008.
- 6 'Archbishop says State to blame for schools crisis', *The Irish Times*, 6 September, 2007, p.1
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 'Catholic Church wants more mixed-faith schools', *The Irish Independent*, 14 December 2007, p. 26.
- 9 'State has duty to provide alternative to faith schools' *The Irish Times*, 8 September 2007, p.13.
- 10 'More multi-faith schools sought' *The Irish Times*, 24 May 2007, p.8.
- 11 For a copy of the Charter in full see Appendix F below, published with permission.
- 12 Educate Together (2005) *What is an Educate Together School?* Educate Together, Dublin, p. 5.
- 13 *ibid.*, p.9.
- 14 *ibid.*, pp. 6-10.
- 15 Educate Together (2004) *Learn Together: An Ethical educational curriculum for Educate Together schools*, Educate Together, Dublin, p.8.
- 16 *ibid.* For the philosophical rationale and theoretical foundations of the curriculum see pp.7-13.
- 17 It is worth noting however, that in late 2007 and early 2008 NICIE carried out a consultation with integrated schools and across the wider integrated education movement to re-examine their twenty year old statement of principles <http://www.nicie.org/aboutus/default.asp?id=27> and discuss whether they need to be updated. One of the topics for consideration was this self-designation that the integrated school 'is essentially Christian in character'.
- 18 Educate Together (2004) 'The Origin, Development and Potential of the Educate Together Sector', pp. 6-7, available from http://www.educatetogether.ie/reference_articles/Ref_Art_005.html
- 19 The first school examined was set up before Educate Together was formally incorporated as a company in 1988, and therefore the patron body actually comprises all of the parents.
- 20 *What is an Educate Together School?* p.6.
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 *ibid.*, p.9.



Conclusions & Recommendations

We began this report by arguing that there is in principle no reason why one should prefer an education system that involves greater levels of sharing (or separation) over one that involves lower levels of sharing (or separation). In presenting this argument, we sought to challenge some commonly held, but typically unexamined, assumptions. Many people approach the issue of education with fixed notions of what a good school ought to look like. For example, some people may think that education ought to be premised on a concern for the preservation and perpetuation of cultural diversity and religious faith, whereas another person may think that a good education ought to be premised on a principled concern for deeper levels of social integration. But at the theoretical level, the fact remains that there is no particular reason to prefer the one kind of system over the other.

We recognise that some people may be troubled by this argument. However, the absence of a determinate answer to the question as to what makes for a good education system can actually be turned into a strength. A guiding assumption of this research report was that we need to start from where we are rather than from where we would ideally like to be. More specifically, we need to have an inclusive dialogue, involving all of those parents and stakeholders who have a genuine interest in education and, potentially, education reform. That dialogue needs to take into consideration necessary structural and procedural changes within and between schools to promote sharing.

It has been maintained throughout this report that all schools can play their part in sharing. Yet in order to play their part, they must be willing not just to do new things, but to do old things differently. Regardless of where it takes place within the education system, sharing must be based on a commitment to equality. The equality at issue here concerns not just the interests of parents and the demands that they might make for particular types of schools, but also the interests of the various representatives of the different school sectors; both need to have a sense of ownership of the process by which change might be made. There are many vested interests at play, and it would be foolhardy to ignore or indeed to place them in a hierarchy. Once this has been realised and accepted, it becomes apparent that there is a plethora of options available, with no 'right or wrong' answer.

Following deliberations and the examination of the case of Northern Ireland, it is clear to us that both parents and representatives were willing to support shared education initiatives; for many it was actually desirable. Significantly though, a consideration repeatedly raised is that people did not want to be co-opted and forced to share. Indeed, to force an agenda of sharing might actually be self-defeating, since it may alienate people. Yet crucially, to say that sharing should be voluntary is not the same as saying that sharing should be left to chance or that it should be allowed to develop organically. If sharing is left to chance, it simply may not happen. And even if it were to happen organically, people might not have been fully aware of all the options that were before them. So, while it is clearly the case that people should not be co-opted into sharing (because it risks the charge of ‘social engineering’), this does not take from the fact the people still need clear guidance.

It was also apparent from our research that sharing should not be understood in isolation from other considerations. In particular, sharing is unlikely to succeed unless it is conjoined to, for example, questions of economic efficiency and academic attainment. In this regard, the *Independent Strategic Review of Education* was correct. The moral case for increased sharing is implicated in a broader set of complex issues that must be handled sensitively. While our research shows that some people are morally committed to sharing, and hence to the view that sharing is valuable in its own right, a general lesson is that, for the most part, the likelihood of people sharing more will be driven by very pragmatic concerns. People are instrumental.

Simplistic analyses must therefore be avoided at all costs, since a singular focus will most likely lead to opposition from those directly affected by the proposed change. For example, schools are not merely economic enterprises, but are part of the community in which they are located. Although it may appear obvious in Northern Ireland, given the culture of public consultation, it is difficult to think of another area of public policy that ordinary people might wish to scrutinise so carefully. After all, in a divided society, the protection of cultural identities and religious traditions within schools matters to people, and in any society, particularly for parents the education of children is paramount.

One final point of immense significance arose from the Northern Ireland case study. As we have indicated, we found a clear willingness and even desire to explore options for sharing. At the same time, there was a line in the sand which people were not willing to cross: ethos. More specifically, the desire to prevent any diminution of ethos was the starting point from which many people came to the discussion; but it was also the end point of discussion for

them. This finding was hardly surprising, given that we were dealing with a deeply divided society – that is, a society characterised by significant levels of inter-communal fear and distrust. In keeping with the overall tenor of this report, we argue that the best way to deal with feelings of distrust of this nature is to empower people to decide for themselves how that ethos can best be protected whilst at one and same time enabling greater levels of sharing to take place.

Again, we argue that issues of this kind should not be left to chance. Although we counsel against prescription, we contend that there is a pressing need for guidance. We also contend that lessons for Northern Ireland can be drawn through comparative analysis.

From the comparative case studies that we conducted, a number of general lessons for Northern Ireland can be derived:

1. It is clear to us that sharing is heavily context dependent. In particular, the scope and nature of sharing will be coloured by social, economic and educational objectives. Although interdependent, those three objectives will vary from case to case and each one of them may be present to one degree or another. Ideally, sharing should be driven by all three of these objectives. But in terms of change, the fact remains that some may be more salient than others, depending on the context. Furthermore, there is no hierarchy between these objectives: despite what some advocates of sharing might think, there is no reason to suggest that, for example, social objectives are more important than economic objectives in convincing those involved of the need to share more. Indeed, creating a hierarchy may in fact deter people. It was clear to us that, in the most successful cases of sharing, the three objectives were satisfied simultaneously. This is perhaps an obvious point, but one that might easily be overlooked.
2. The tendency when looking at sharing in schools is to think in terms of ‘contact hypothesis’. Among other things, that hypothesis supposes that sharing will work best when children and young people are roughly equal, not just in terms of actual physical numbers, but also in terms of the recognition afforded to their particular cultural background or religious tradition. Significantly, our research suggests that sharing works best when equality encompasses not just the recognition of cultural backgrounds or religious traditions, but also the status, power and responsibility afforded to diversity of traditions within the management structure of the school. This extended conception of equality was best captured in terms of a sense of joined ownership over

the process through which schools were created and subsequently maintained. This goes to further illustrate and reinforce one of this report's basic points: people cannot, and should not, be co-opted but should instead be encouraged on a voluntary basis.

3. Sharing works best when parents are involved in the process by which a school comes into being and is maintained. In other words, sharing works best when the process is democratic, when people have a chance to become informed about the options before them, and when they freely consent to be governed by a system of their own choosing and design.
4. Ethos is often hard to define, but what is clear is that it is directly linked to the preservation of culture or religious tradition. Whatever the model of sharing that emerges, convincing people that ethos will be preserved is vitally important. The extent to which sharing can take place will necessarily be delimited by the need to address this concern. Convincing people that their ethos has been both appropriately recognised and protected may, however, create space for flexibility at some future point. It is reasonable to conclude that, where people feel confident that their tradition, culture or values are not under threat, those people will be more open to increased sharing.
5. In the most successful models of sharing, the ethos of particular cultures and religious traditions were not only recognised and protected, but were actually strengthened. As such, sharing need not dilute or diminished the ethos of particular traditions or religions, but may actually increase the role of ethos within a school. In other words, the more conscious people become of the significant position ethos has within their school, largely as a result of being juxtaposed to an alternative ethos, the more proactive they become in seeking out ways of maintaining and even deepening their own particular way of life or outlook.
6. In the most successful models of sharing, the preservation of ethos enabled the school to move forward with confidence in the building of an overarching school identity. That overarching identity was the focus of an overlapping consensus embodying shared values and common points of identity. One way of capturing this phenomenon is to say that the school was characterised by 'nested identities' (i.e., one identity sitting comfortably within another) which facilitated the celebration of both distinctiveness and commonality. Again, it is important to stress the building of an overarching school identity was not forced (people were not co-opted into accepting it), but

was instead was a product of the structures for sharing themselves and their judicious operation in practice.

7. Whilst maintaining the particular ethos associated with distinctive cultures or religious traditions, the activity of sharing allowed something to happen that otherwise could not have happened, namely schools, or the campus within which they were situated could proactively enrol children and young people from different communities. They were not just formally open to all but actively appealed to all. In short, the schools that we examined were able to get the best of both worlds.
8. Again, successful models of sharing are premised upon a clear agreement on the structures and procedures under which they will operate. Protocols were jointly agreed and put in place, governing as much as feasibly possible about the day-to-day running of the school (e.g., what is going to be taught, how it is going to be taught, who is going to teach it). Crucially, the protocols also governed how much sharing was to take place and under what conditions it would occur.

Of course, it is true that comparison is valuable only up to a point. Northern Ireland is not Scotland, England or Ireland. When it comes to the most salient issues involved in sharing however, and, in particular, in the promotion of shared education, the underlying principles are not geographically contingent. In response to those who may argue that Northern Ireland is unique, we say the following. First, while it is true that continuing community divisions and the legacy of violent conflict has marked Northern Ireland in unique ways, Northern Ireland still benefit from guidance. Northern Ireland can and indeed must learn from experiences elsewhere, although general solutions will of course need to be adapted to local contexts. Second, whilst there might be some reasonable grounds to say that the models used elsewhere will prove difficult to apply, the fact remains that we simply do not know if this would be the case. There is no evidence to suggest that the models we examined could not work. The people who enacted these models were in similar positions in the not so distant past. If they had not been brave enough to try, we would not have been able to report their successes. Third, education is onerous in the sense that it comes with tremendous responsibility. One way of facing that responsibility is to do nothing. This may be perfectly legitimate. But to do nothing is to contribute nothing to the building of a shared and better future for everyone in Northern Ireland.

Appendices

Appendix A: Project questionnaire

Please consider each of the following options for schools and indicate (by ticking) whether you would support, oppose, or neither support nor oppose, each option in the [name of town] area.

Question 1. Types of Schools

Having *both* academic schools and technical/vocational schools

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Having a system of *specialist* schools, each developing at least one area of expertise, like language, science, or technology

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Having a system of all-ability schools, all providing the same wide curriculum

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Question 2. Relations between Schools

Schools sharing facilities like a technology lab or a Sixth Form

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Schools sharing a campus while retaining distinct identities

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Children travelling to neighbouring schools to be taught subjects unavailable at their own school

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Teachers travelling to neighbouring schools to teach subjects unavailable there

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Question 3. Denominational Collaboration

Retaining all types of schools currently in your area (Controlled, Maintained, Voluntary, Special)

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Establishing jointly managed schools, with management shared between the Catholic Church and the Education and Library Board or Protestant church(es)

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Increasing the number of formal Integrated schools, in which all the partners, including the Churches and the Education and Library Board, have a right to play a role

Support

Neither support nor oppose

Oppose

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Please consider each of the following options for schools in the [name of town] area and indicate (by ticking) whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statements:

Question 4. Educational partnerships

Schools that are not mixed should be required to partner with a school with children of a different religion

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Schools that need to partner to deliver the curriculum should be required to partner with their closest neighbouring school, even if it is not of the same religious composition

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If schools of different religious composition enter partnerships, the children from both schools should at least sometimes be taught in the same classroom

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Question 5. Age-Grouping

Keeping the traditional pattern of ages 11-18 and some ages 11-16 schools

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Having most schools 11-16 and converting one or two schools into 16-18 Sixth Form Colleges

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Schools combining primary and post-primary pupils (for example, ages 7-14)

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Reasons for decision:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Appendix B: Categorical variables for the sample of parents who took part in the 2007 consultation exercise

Marital status	
Single (never married)	10.7%
Married	66.9%
Living as married	7.4%
Separated	9.1%
Divorced	4.1%
Widowed	1.7%
Employment status	
Working full-time	38.0%
Working part-time	19.8%
Not working (seeking work)	1.7%
On a government training scheme	0%
Retired	2.5%
In full-time education	0.8%
Looking after the home	31.4%
Permanently sick or disabled	0%
Not working (and not seeking work)	5.8%
Caring for an elderly/disabled person full-time	0%
Other	0%
Highest educational qualification	
Degree level or higher	19.2%
BTEC/BEC/TEC (higher), HNC, HND	2.5%
GCE A-level (incl. NVQ level 3)	13.3%
BTEC/TEC (national), ONC, OND	4.2%
GCSE (incl. NVQ level 2), GCE O-level	27.5%
CSE (other than grade 1)	5.0%
No formal qualification	21.7%
Other	6.7%
Religion	
Catholic	63.3%
Protestant	34.2%
Other	2.5%

Appendix C: A charter for Catholic schools in Scotland

SCOTTISH CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICE



A CHARTER for CATHOLIC SCHOOLS in SCOTLAND

The mission of the Catholic school is to develop as a community of faith and learning, providing the highest quality of education, and offering formation through the promotion of Gospel values, through celebration and worship, and through service to the common good.

All Catholic schools in Scotland, in honouring Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, will feature the following characteristics:

- * a commitment to the integrated education and formation of the whole person, in close partnership with parents as the first educators of their children;
- * an inclusive ethos which aims to honour the life, dignity and voice of each person, made in the image of God;
- * a commitment to the search for wisdom in life and to the pursuit of excellence, through the development of each person's unique God-given talents;
- * a commitment to the spiritual formation of the school community, through the shared experience of prayer and liturgy, and in partnership with local parishes;
- * the provision of religious education programmes which will enable young people to develop their understanding of Gospel values and of how to apply them to life;
- * a commitment to uphold the moral teaching, faith tradition and sacramental life of the Catholic Church;
- * a commitment to communicate Catholic social teaching and thereby to promote social justice and opportunity for all;
- * a commitment to ecumenical action and the unity of Christians;
- * the promotion of respect for different beliefs and cultures and for inter-faith dialogue;
- * a commitment to support the continuing professional and spiritual development of staff.

All staff appointed to a Catholic school are expected to support and promote the aims, mission, values and ethos of the school, as illustrated in this Charter.



published by the Scottish Catholic Education Service on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Appendix D: Protocol for shared management campus schools



Protocol for Management of a Shared Campus

After full discussion the Council and the Diocese of Motherwell reached agreement on the design of the shared campus schools included in the Education 2010 PPP project. The principles which have been incorporated in all these schools are the following:

- the individual identity and autonomy of both schools must be preserved
- the clearly defined teaching and learning areas for each school must be separate
- in educational terms, both schools must be able to operate independently to develop their own ethos, educational principles and curriculum
- shared facilities will be centrally located with independent access from each school and no cross over of staff or pupils from one school to another in normal circumstances
- there must be separate entrances to the schools to allow the display of iconography related to the distinctive nature of the schools. However, these can be centrally located beside each other
- there must be separate but adjacent reception and administration areas
- there must be separate but adjacent staff rooms which offer flexibility for a larger meeting space
- the need for separate library, PE and assembly facilities will be determined by analysis of curricular need
- shared facilities must be sufficient for the combined needs of both schools
- facilities designated for community, multipurpose and shared use must not be seen as belonging to one school or the other

In addition, the Council indicated that a protocol for the management of shared campus facilities, including the operation of shared libraries, would be developed. These matters are covered in this leaflet. The protocol was developed in consultation with headteachers and the Diocese.

1. Head Teacher leadership

- 1.1 The Head Teachers of both establishments have a vital role to play in establishing an ethos of mutual respect and consideration. Communication between them must be purposeful, regular and reflect a flexible attitude to the needs of each establishment. This may happen on a daily informal basis but provision may also be made for regular meetings. The head teachers must be proactive in setting the tone in the shared campus for staff, pupils and parents.
- 1.2 It is important that all staff but particularly senior management are aware of the potential issues, for example in the following areas:
 - Separate identity
 - Access to shared facilities
 - Discipline
 - Playground issues
 - Contract Transport
 - Parking
 - Health & Safety etc.

These potential issues should be anticipated at an early stage and action taken to ensure that the agreed policies and procedures are made known to all interested parties including staff, parents, pupils and the local diocese.

2. Opportunities for liaison

- 2.1 Opportunities for liaison exist in the following areas, for example:
 - Social, professional, resource sharing, experience sharing, working parties, stage liaison, school performances.
 - Joint development plan priority (annual) supported by joint inservice.
 - Scottish Opera, RSNO school workshops on a shared stage basis etc.

3. Administration

- 3.1 It is important that the admin and support staff, though separate and autonomous, have guidance on issues where collaboration may be useful and helpful.

4. Communication

- 4.1 Effective communication is vital in a shared campus. The following have proved useful, for example:
 - School notice boards in the staffroom
 - Staff weekly newsheet
 - Day book
 - Sharing school newsletters
 - Regular joint SMT meetings etc.
- 4.2 All staff must know what is going on in their establishment and any shared issues. Parents also must be kept informed. This may mean that selected communiqués to parents are agreed by both schools, for example:
 - Contract transport
 - Congestion/parking
 - Emergency issues
 - Acceptable dress codes
 - Joint activities etc.
- 4.3 All staff, pupils and parents must be made aware that they have a role to play in this new establishment. It is part of the wider community and demands that all involved respect the rights of everyone in that community.

5. Ethos

- 5.1 This is most important. Every school is aware of the need to establish a "Good Ethos". The responsibility for developing the ethos of the individual schools lies with each head teacher and the partners in the wider school community.

- 5.2 In developing the ethos of the shared campus communities some of the following approaches might be useful, for example:
- Joint staff working parties
 - Joint development plan priorities (Eco Award, Health Promoting)
 - Pupil councils initiatives (choice of playground games etc)
 - Charity fund raising (Head Teachers need to be sensitive to choices)
 - Enterprising approaches
 - Scottish Opera/RSNO
 - Joint school productions
 - Involvement in the community
 - Out Of School Hours Learning (OOSHL) – joint extra-curricular activities etc.
- 5.3 The success of a shared campus is determined by respect, flexibility and communication. The professionalism of all staff and their ability to respond to the challenges and opportunities offered by this new venture are paramount. The consideration and co-operation displayed by them will become the role model for all members of this new community.
- 6. Promoting Positive Behaviour**
- 6.1 It could be advisable to have shared principles drawn up by both schools, or at least a set of agreed guidance that allows flexibility and further discussion.
- 6.2 Behaviour management in all shared areas is the responsibility of the whole school community. A common approach to promoting positive behaviour should be agreed and implemented by all.
- 7. Playground/Sports Area**
- 7.1 Supervision of outdoor areas will be the remit of staff from both schools. Schools should agree the use and function of playground space.
- 7.2 The management of playground behaviour should be agreed and implemented by all playground supervisors.
- 7.3 Pupils must be aware that due respect must be given to all adults regardless of which establishment employs them. Parents should also be made aware of the close liaison on agreed procedures between the staff of both establishments when dealing with discipline or bullying issues.
- 7.4 Opportunities to establish positive playground relationships include the following, for example:
- Using sports co-ordinators collaboratively
 - Introduction of Playground Pals
 - Pupil councils involvement in playground games choice
 - Use of Litter Detectives
 - Joint sports activities etc.
- 8 Time-tabling arrangements**
- 8.1 The shared areas must be timetabled to ensure that each class, not necessarily each school, has equal access and due recognition given to the need to secure religious observance times.
- 8.2 Try to ensure that there are always blank spaces to allow for flexibility. In addition if at any time throughout the term a member of staff wishes to change their allocated time, a simple request on the staff noticeboard or a note sent round usually resolves the situation.
- 9 Management of Interval and Lunch Times**
- 9.1 If both schools have the same interval and lunchtimes it allows for the pupils to mix more in a social situation and provides the maximum number of joint supervisory staff.
- 9.2 Lunches depending on the size of the shared campus may require a ROTA system. The rota should establish a fair system where each class from both establishments is allocated the same number of 1st, 2nd and 3rd sittings.
- 10 Display Areas**
- 10.1 If display areas are in the general foyer they should reflect both schools as individual establishments and also reflect any joint initiatives. Displays in the shared areas, corridors and joint withdrawal areas, should be agreed and acceptable to both Head Teachers and reflect the ethos and traditions of both schools.
- 11 School Uniforms**
- 11.1 This is a matter for the individual schools involved in the shared campus and to the parents and children of both schools. However, North Lanarkshire Council policy on dress code should be rigidly imposed and the parents made aware of this. This should include all clothing, outer garments, scarves, and any other items involving 'team colours'.
- 12 Resources**
- 12.1 Shared resources and equipment for the use of both schools should be stored in shared areas. All members of staff are responsible for the care and upkeep of these.
- 12.2 It should be noted that shared resources and equipment in any joint library area must be agreed and acceptable to both Head Teachers. If there is any concern the item or items should not be available in a shared area.
- 13 Budget**
- 13.1 The schools have separate budgets and only on a few occasions do they overlap. Support from the Administration and Finance Assistant (AFA) is given to each school in these matters.
- 14 Nursery Management**
- 14.1 Early Years education is non-denominational and parents of both schools should have a feeling of ownership.
- 15 Local Clergy**
- 15.1 Close partnership between both schools and their local clergy is of paramount importance in establishing the shared campus as a positive focus for the local community and promoting respect for all. This relationship can further enhance ecumenical relationships within the local community. Clergy visits whether individual or joint are welcomed by the Head Teachers, staff and pupils of both schools.
- 15.2 Joint assemblies led by representatives of local churches to celebrate the successes enjoyed by the campus each term have a positive contribution to make.
- 16 Parents**
- 16.1 Links between the parents of both schools should be established prior to the opening of the shared campus.
- 16.2 Schools Boards have an important role to play in supporting their individual establishment and working together to promote, where appropriate, successful resolution of joint issues.
- 16.3 Each school in a shared campus may have individual Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) but again there are many opportunities for members to work together to provide joint social or fund raising activities for the pupils.
- 17 Review**
- 17.1 The protocol should be reviewed and be the focus for discussion with all new appointments to senior management positions in schools within the shared campus.

Appendix E: Example of a Mission Statement of a Jointly Managed Church School

Rooted in the teaching of Christ, we are a learning and loving community, united in faith, actively encouraging each individual to reach his / her full potential through serving one another in a caring and worshipping environment.

Supporting statement

We believe that the essential nature of a Joint Church School is one of a Christian community. We believe that Christ is our cornerstone and this is at the heart of what we do. It is within this conviction that we hold the responsibility to develop in each individual an awareness of the principal teachings of the Christian faith.

Within our Christian family we strive to achieve the highest standards by creating a school that enables us to:

- Recognise worship as the centre of our life as a church school
- Nurture Gospel values of faith, hope, love, forgiveness, justice and peace
- Appreciate and respect each individual as a person
- Support reconciliation between our two churches and between each other
- Educate the whole person in terms of the spiritual, academic, social, cultural and physical
- Identify and develop each person's potential and personal qualities
- Celebrate the gifts of every individual
- Serve the school community by participation, support and contribution to the common good
- Nurture the relationship between home, school and the church community
- Encourage respect and responsibility for both the immediate and the wider world

Appendix F: Educate Together Charter

Recalling Article 26.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”

and Article 42.4 of the Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland):

“The state shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation”,

and recognising:

1.1 That many parents have a valid preference for schools in which boys and girls of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds can be educated together in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect,

1.2 That the multi-denominational schools established under the banner of Educate Together are a distinctive response to the growing demand for such an option within the Irish educational system,

Educate Together affirms that:

2.1 Children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds have a right to an education that respects their individual identity whilst exploring the different values and traditions of the world in which they live,

2.2 Parents are entitled to participate actively in decisions that affect the education of their children. In particular, they have the right to decide what kind of school reflects their conscience and lawful preference,

2.3 Multi-denominational schools have the right to be treated no less favourably than other schools within the Irish educational system, in accordance with their needs and their identity,

2.4 The state has a duty to take the identity of the multi-denominational sector fully into account when deciding on policy that affects the establishment and development of schools,

and Commits itself to:

3.1 Support the establishment of schools which are,

Multi-denominational i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected,

Co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities,

Child centred in their approach to education,

Democratically run with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming professional role of the teachers, in any area where the demand for such a school exists,

3.2 Promote fuller awareness and recognition of the identity of the multi-denominational sector at all levels in Irish society and abroad,

3.3 Participate in appropriate structures and activities concerned with the future development of education in Ireland and abroad,

3.4 Promote a future where multi-denominational education will be as freely available to parents as any other educational option they may choose.

Formally launched on 12th May 1990 at the Aula Maxima, University College Galway, Ireland. Amended on April 17th 1999 at the first Annual General Meeting of Educate Together, Bray Co. Wicklow. © Educate Together, 2004

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