

Press statement

Issued on behalf of: Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

Dated: 20.01.2022

The Integrated Education Bill has passed the consideration stage in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Bill makes recommendations for substantial change prioritising support for one sector at a time when an independent review of education is underway which will make recommendations for change in the system as a whole. Many concerns have been raised about the outworking of the proposed legislation if it passes in its current albeit amended form.

CCMS schools actively promote access and inclusion for children of all ability and religious, social, and cultural backgrounds. Our schools enhance communities and as evidenced by newcomer application data, continue to increase their capacity for both diversity and excellence.

44% of primary and 29% of post-primary schools in Northern Ireland are Catholic Maintained schools - when added to Catholic Managed Voluntary Grammar figures, the total enrolment of pupils attending Catholic Schools equates to 44.7% of the school age population.

Catholic schools continue to attract such a significant percentage of the school age population, including the highest percentage of newcomer children across all educational sectors, due to the diversity and quality of their educational provision. They are examples of naturally integrated education in its truest form.

The Bill's definition of integration devalues the efforts of Catholic schools who work diligently within communities to encourage dialogue, peace and understanding. It diminishes the positive changes that many so many governors, principals, staff, and young people have cultivated in their schools and communities and through shared education programmes and partnerships.

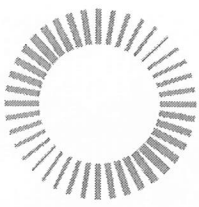
Catholic schools contribute positively to the education system through the pursuit of excellence whilst remaining faithful to their distinctive ethos, vision, and approach. The purpose of integrated education proposed in the Bill could apply to all Catholic Schools and indeed to schools across all sectors.

CCMS wants to ensure that every child, irrespective of religious, ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic background has equal access to reach their full potential and contribute to building a strong economy. Regrettably, in its current form the Bill prioritises Integrated Schools above every other school.

CCMS are grateful to all Members of the Assembly that have engaged with them to date. CCMS encourages active dialogue with political representatives and educational partners to ensure that parents and students retain the right to access education through choice.

Diversity in education should be valued, along with the right of parents to choose education provision in line with their religious and philosophical convictions. This can only be achieved through working together to cultivate an equitable, diverse, and mutually respectful education provision for all sectors.

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Notes to Editors

- The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is the managing authority for 443 schools in Northern Ireland, employing approximately 6,500 teachers.
- CCMS was established under the auspices of **1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order**, the Council's primary purpose is the provision of an upper tier of management for the Catholic Maintained Sector with the primary objective of raising standards in Catholic maintained Schools. The core activities of the Council are set out in Articles 142-146 and Schedule 8 of the 1989 Order.
- CCMS supports trustees in the provision of school buildings and governors and principals in the effective management and control of schools.
- As a major employer of teachers, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools works in partnership with other multidisciplinary bodies to promote strategies and operational mechanisms to address key educational issues. In so doing increases access and improves the learning environment for all.
- CCMS has a wider role within the Northern Ireland Education sector and contributes with education partners to policy on a wide range of issues such as curriculum review, selection, pre-school education, pastoral care and leadership

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