

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM

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### FEIDHMIÚ CHOMHAONTÚ AOINE AN CHÉASTA

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

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*Déardaoin, 26 Meán Fómhair 2019*

*Thursday, 26 September 2019*

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The Joint Committee met at 2.10 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Declan Breathnach,	Frances Black,
Fergus O'Dowd,	Gerard P. Craughwell,
Maureen O'Sullivan,	Niall Ó Donnghaile.
Brendan Smith.	

Teachta / Deputy Seán Crowe sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

### **Integrated Education: Discussion**

**Chairman:** Apologies have been received from Senators Feighan and Ned O’Sullivan. Today we are delighted to hear from the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education on their work. This work earned them a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in 2019 and I know members will be very keen to hear about the positive contributions that they are making.

Before we begin, I remind members, witnesses and those in the Public Gallery to turn off their phones or turn them on airplane mode as it interferes with the sound and broadcasting system, even when on silent. I also remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I draw the attention of witnesses to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the Chair to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I welcome Ms Roisin Marshall, chief executive of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, Ms Amanda McNamee, principal, Lagan College, Ms Hilary Copeland, chair of trustees, Integrated AlumNI, and Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons, head of communications, Integrated Education Fund.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** We thank the committee for the invitation to brief it on integrated education and welcome this opportunity. Members will be aware that the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2019. We appreciate the committee seeing us in this context and for the support that Deputies and Senators have given us over a long number of years, support which we hope will continue.

The Nobel Peace Prize nomination is, of course, not for our two organisations as much as for those courageous, resilient and visionary parents, pupils, staff and governors of integrated schools and, in particular, the first 28 pupils who attended Lagan College. The current principal of that school is with us this afternoon. In the statement the committee makes after this meeting, we would be very appreciative if it acknowledged the Nobel Peace Prize nomination and the recognition this bestows on all our pioneering families, staff and governors.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** I will give a brief overview of Integrated Education and how it has developed over the past 38 years. Founded in 1981 by a group of parents in response to the challenge of community conflict and a religiously divided school system in Northern Ireland, Lagan College was the first integrated school in Northern Ireland. Beginning with just 28 pupils, Lagan College is now the most oversubscribed school in Northern Ireland.

By 1987 there were seven newly established integrated schools and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, NICIE, was formed as a charitable organisation to co-ordinate efforts to develop integrated education and to support parent groups through the process of opening new schools. The 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order enabled NICIE to support existing schools to grow and to promote integrated education.

In 1992 the Integrated Education Fund, IEF, was established as a charity to provide a financial foundation for the development and growth of integrated education in Northern Ireland. The IEF mandate is derived from the expressed demand of parents and individual schools who seek integrated education for their children and pupils.

In 2014, there was a landmark High Court judgment which compelled the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to fulfil its legal duty under article 64 of the 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order and the commitment in the Good Friday Agreement “to facilitate and encourage integrated education”. Not only did the judgment rule that the Department needs to be alive to its article 64 duty at all levels, including the strategic level, but it also outlined what an integrated school is striving for, namely “to achieve an equal balance in relation to worship, celebration and exposure to both faiths ... reflected in its constitution ... and the [school’s] board must strive in its ethos to achieve this”. For these reasons, an integrated school seeks to achieve religious balance among its pupils and its board of governors.

Since then the Department of Education has recognised its legal duty and agreed more than 25 school development proposals, DPs, providing in excess of 1,500 additional places in integrated schools in recent years. This growth has been further enhanced by the Stormont House Agreement and Fresh Start agreement capital commitment of £300 million to 23 existing integrated schools, of which three capital projects have been completed and one is under way, with the rest due to be completed by 2025.

In terms of community and parental empowerment, no integrated school has ever been planned by the Government, yet despite this there are now more than 24,000 pupils attending 65 integrated schools, and demand for integrated school places continues to grow. The funding crisis in the overall education system means that the focus for growing the number of integrated schools and school places is on supporting existing schools in transforming from non-integrated to integrated status rather than on building more new schools.

To support and fulfil the wishes of parents for integrated education, the IEF has raised money from a range of funders, including individual donors and trusts, to help empower parents seeking to transform their children’s schools. This parental engagement campaign was launched in 2017. The IEF and NICIE acknowledge and thank the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its support for this initiative and its ongoing commitment over the past 15 years to NICIE and the IEF in supporting integrated education through its reconciliation fund.

The parental engagement campaign uses a range of tools, including a dedicated website - [www.integratemy school.com](http://www.integratemy school.com) - to encourage parents to register their support for their school to transform to integrated status. This bottom-up approach is also supported through outreach and direct engagement with parents, communities and schools. The success of this campaign is highlighted in a survey by the polling company LucidTalk, which shows that awareness of the process of transformation rose from 8% in 2012 to over 40% in 2018.

NICIE continues to provide practical support to encourage schools to take this step and then works with them through the process, which can take up to two or three years. In the

past 40 years, we have had 20 schools transform. Since the launch of the parental engagement campaign in 2017, we have had six more schools taking the first steps on the journey towards integrated status by holding successful parental ballots on transformation.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** Northern Ireland remains a divided society. This is most notable in the largely separate nature of our education provision, which means that the majority of our children and young people of school age continue to be educated within a single-identity setting. Approximately 90% of pupils in Northern Ireland are educated in schools that identify with a single tradition or denomination. Only 7.2% of pupils in controlled schools are Catholic and 1.1% of pupils in Catholic-maintained schools are Protestant.

The collapse of the Assembly has presented challenges in growing integrated education, but it has also provided an opportunity for the integrated education movement to engage with politicians, educational stakeholders and academics to look at a way forward and seek agreement on an independent commission to review education. The IEF's alternative manifesto sets out a roadmap for a more inclusive and integrated education system, and our collaboration with academics in the Ulster University school of education provides robust evidence-based research that is helping to cast a light on some of the areas of education that contribute to school separation and additional costs. An example of this work can be seen in the briefing paper, Employment Mobility of Teachers and the FETO Exception, which we have supplied to the committee.

I will hand over to Ms McNamee to provide a little bit of background of integration in practice.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** I thank everyone for the invitation to attend. I have the proud role of being principal of Lagan College in south Belfast. I am having a lovely day out in Dublin.

As Ms Marshall stated, Lagan College is Northern Ireland's first integrated post-primary school. It was founded in 1981 against the setting of the Troubles. We started off very small with 28 students - 14 children of Catholic faith and 14 of Protestant faith. The school was originally housed in south Belfast beside the River Lagan, hence its name. Over the years, it has flourished. We now have 1,386 students from the ages of 11 to 18 years and 191 staff. We are an integrated, inclusive and united community on a beautiful National Trust site.

The school was established by parents with the mission statement: "To educate to the highest standards the [children] of Catholics, Protestants [and other faith traditions and none] and of all abilities, together." The four central values that underpin our school are respect, reconciliation, service and equality. The children are educated together every day. Self-respect and respect for others are strongly encouraged. The integrated ethos is taught and shared to ensure the inclusion of children from different religions, cultures, genders, abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, sexualities, preschool needs and special needs as well as children of newcomer status and looked after children. Anyone is welcome in our school.

Lagan College serves to celebrate all that we have in common and to encourage the children to understand that we must appreciate the things that make us different and unique as individuals. Our school chaplains state that if something is important to one of us, it should be important to all of us. Therefore, everything we do we do as one school community. We hold prayer, if that is the child's choice, together or we take time to reflect on things that are happening locally and in the world. We have assemblies, such as Remembrance Day assembly and Ash Wednesday assembly, together and we encourage our children to discuss controversial issues rather than shy away from them.

Over 38 years, Lagan College has built up a reputation for integrated practice, academic excellence and pastoral child-centred care. Lagan College is an all-ability school as well as a family school, in that we can take all of the children from the same family. We offer 32 GCSE and 25 A level courses at post-16 level. Aspects of the curriculum, such as religious education, RE, politics and history, are viewed by children through a shared lens. The learning that we offer is fun, innovative and challenging so that every child can reach his or her true potential.

I have been told by the children to mention our sport. We play sport for enjoyment, to build team spirit and to win. We have been the all-Ireland basketball champions. Last year, we won the JJ Riley Cup in Gaelic football, which the boys were really proud of, and we have a strong reputation in other sports, for example, football, hockey, netball and rugby.

Lagan College has been in a strong position and we have been supported by our local community. We have been the most oversubscribed school for the past decade, with 554 applications for 220 places this year alone. As principal of Lagan College in south Belfast, I believe that there is a greater demand that we as a school can meet. I call passionately upon all of those in government to support integrated schools as the norm for families to be able to choose if they wish. We are educating children not only for their own futures and career pathways, but to be the peace leaders of all our futures.

I thank the committee for having me.

**Ms Hilary Copeland:** I thank the committee for inviting us to attend. I will speak to it from the perspective as a past pupil of integrated education. Like many other alumni, I got involved in setting up the Integrated AlumNI in 2013. A number of former pupils of integrated schools who now live and work in various locations throughout the UK, Ireland and the US came together to offer us a social network group and a way to connect, to help support and encourage present pupils at integrated colleges through mentoring, career advice and helping to raise their aspirations, to spread the message about integrated education, and to lobby and campaign.

I will tell the committee a little about when I first went to an integrated school. The school I attended is called New-Bridge Integrated College and is situated approximately 40 minutes south of Belfast and 40 minutes north of the Border. When I started there at 11 years of age, the school was in the third year of its existence. There had been a long delay in the development of the school site in 1995 in the rural, small village of Loughbrickland in County Down. The delay owed to the fact that, after the site was finally secured, the farmer who owned the field would only permit building work to commence once his harvest had been taken in. By the time I started school in 1997, there were 156 pupils in the student body, which could easily have fitted into one of the committee rooms. During my time at New-Bridge, there were no illustrious past pupils to return and speak at assemblies and prize days because nobody had yet graduated. In 1997, when I was 11 and starting secondary school, none of the issues happening around me, in the mouth of the Good Friday Agreement to be signed the following year, was a factor for me. I was not aware of what was going on or what the adults around me were deciding about my future. I knew that my parents had let me do what I wanted, namely, go to New-Bridge. Although I was academically able and had secured a place at a grammar school, they were happy for me to attend a school that did not have any academic attainment record, past pupils or an established reputation.

When I look back now as an adult, I think about how brave we all were to take such a great leap of faith on an unfinished school that, weeks previously, had been a field, at a time when our country seemed to have little faith in the notions of peace and co-operation. Twenty years later,

I am proud we all had faith in the experiment. In particular, I think of the staff who left permanent positions at other schools to come, take part, build and establish a new place for us all, and of how hard we all worked, because we wanted to make it work. We were very much united in a confident belief that the model of education, despite its apparently humble beginnings and despite us knowing we were in the minority, would build a better future for us all.

When I started working as an adult, I lived in Scotland for a while and then moved back to work in arts management in Belfast. It was clear to me then, when I worked with others who had attended school in Northern Ireland, that their experience of school had been different from mine and that was when I started to realise what that had meant to me. I learned that learning, working and making friends with all kinds of people who could talk about our differences and joke about the same matters about which we saw the rest of our country fight was a normal part of our education. It was just school to us. I became aware that for most children in Northern Ireland, their experience of school is not at all the same, and we in the Integrated AlumNI believed we could change that.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** We share the vision held by the overwhelming majority of citizens of a united community and a shared future. We are confident a more integrated education system should be at the heart of the reconciliation process, as reflected in the Good Friday Agreement, which states “An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.”

I again thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to appear before it and to give some background on integrated education.

**Chairman:** I thank our guests for their opening statements. I call Senator Black.

**Senator Frances Black:** I apologise that I will have to leave the meeting a little early to attend to another commitment. I very much wanted to attend the meeting and wish I could stay for the whole afternoon because I am very interested in the subject matter. When I attended a social event in the North approximately a month ago, I met a teacher from an integrated school. I am ashamed to say I had not even been aware that integrated schools existed there. When I heard our guests’ contributions, I thought we needed to learn about the subject. I congratulate our guests on their Nobel Peace Prize, which is a fantastic achievement.

**Chairman:** It is a nomination.

**Senator Frances Black:** I apologise. I always like to think ahead. Our guests will win the prize and there is no doubt they deserve it.

I am intrigued by how integrated education works. It is powerful to think there are so many cross-community students in the school, although I have no doubt some issues must arise there. Are there times when there could be problems between groups from two different communities? How is such a problem managed? Perhaps it is just my ignorance, but do our guests find that in sport, for example, if one group plays GAA whereas another group plays rugby or football, there is any separation between them, and if so, how is that managed?

**Chairman:** Deputy Breathnach has to leave the meeting to speak in the Chamber presently and, therefore, I call him now.

**Deputy Declan Breathnach:** I thank Mr. Fitzsimmons, Ms Marshall, Ms McNamee and

Ms Copeland for their excellent presentations. My background is as a primary school teacher for 35 years before I was elected to the House. I worked in a small primary school where we embraced the integration of boys and girls, first, and of disability, second. The benefit from that, in the influence on all children and adults, not least in the disability sector, spoke for itself. Like Senator Black, I wish our guests well in their nomination. As somebody who does not live too far from Loughbrickland, I did not even know of the existence of the school. I wish it and Lagan College every success.

Both presentations related to secondary school. Is there integration at primary level in the North? My philosophy is that everybody should have respect for everybody else's view of the world. Senator Black mentioned various sporting activities. There is currently a debate on whether the national anthem or otherwise should be played at rugby matches and so on. I am especially interested in whether there is integration of language. In some of my visits to the North related to this committee, we have visited all-Irish schools, which I support as a Gaeilgeoir. Is there an issue with teaching various languages or with sport? Do students get the opportunity to engage with and learn about other people's customs and - dare I say it - religion? One does not have to be religious but there may be integration on the rugby, soccer or Gaelic pitch.

I presume that the opposite of integration is segregation, of which we had too much in the past. It is not just an issue in the North but it also needs to be addressed throughout the nation in order that people will have a respectful view of the world. I am delighted that our guests made their presentations and wish them all in their future.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** There are more than 44 feeder primary schools for children enrolling at Lagan College. Not all those young people have attended an integrated primary school and, therefore, when the children start secondary school, we have to make very clear the ethos and values of the school. Many of the children will have held many similar values through family life, having been raised by their families before coming to school, but we cannot take for granted that the children will know how to learn from and respect one another. That has to be helped and supported. We take from the Latin motto, *Ut Sint Unum*, that we are one school community. We tend to use sport as a great analogy for people forming a team and working together. Much of that is built and shaped by us as teachers and non-teachers to help the children understand who they are. There is often a misconception that integrated schools are sterile communities and that children's culture and faith background, family politics, passport and so on are cleansed out. It is quite the contrary. We are proud of children saying what passport they hold and whether they support teams playing Gaelic games, rugby or soccer. We want to generate healthy discussions in our children and they should not be shy about it. We have not had a problem in Lagan College encouraging children of different backgrounds to engage in sport. Some of our best enrichment rugby players play Gaelic games and *vice versa*. The children enjoy learning about something that they may not have had a chance to learn about in earlier years. We support the children in having access to things they may not have had a chance to experience in primary school.

As far as language is concerned, my school works through the medium of English but every young person who comes to the school gets the opportunity to have enrichment Irish in their first year. We tend to look at the lovely aspects of poetry, prose, song and cultural placenames just to give the children understanding of where the school is situated in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the North of Ireland or whatever way the children want to see themselves. It is about where their home is situated. Beyond their first year at Lagan College, children may choose to

do Spanish, French, Irish right through to A level or the likes of Mandarin, which is new for us.

**Senator Frances Black:** What problems arise with integration? If so, how were they overcome? Have any major lessons been learned since the school opened?

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** We put much energy into encouraging children to understand how they can respectfully speak about their differences. Many adults in our world struggle with that and we, therefore, try to teach ways of listening to somebody else's perspective and giving a point of view back but not falling out because there is a difference. People should certainly not take up arms or hurt somebody because there is a difference. Much of that is about teaching the skills of how to be proud but not fearing somebody else having a different opinion. As principal, I lead by example. I often tell the children about my family, which is integrated, and staff in the school see this as a vocation. We feel we have been drawn to working in an integrated school and we strongly believe there is a passionate peace element to working in integrated education in Belfast.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** Like the Chairman and other speakers, I welcome our delegation and thank them for the comprehensive outline of the achievements to date. There is an obvious need for more progress as well. It is welcome that the Good Friday Agreement refers to facilitating and encouraging integrated education, and all of us would like more progress to be made. With the 65 schools, these institutions educate approximately 8% of the student population, which is still quite low by any yardstick. I had the privilege of visiting Lagan College in the mid-1990s with the British-Irish parliamentary group of the time, comprising Members of the Dáil and Seanad, as well as members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. We did some study on education and where progress could be made but it was a much smaller school at the time. The population today comprises 1,386 students, which is a great achievement. Naturally, I would like to see more integrated schools. We speak about the 65 schools but are these all second level institutions? Are some of them primary schools?

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** That question was asked by Deputy Breathnach as well. There are 45 primary schools and 20 post-primary schools.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I thank Ms Marshall. None of these was a new school. There was growth in many areas and we can take for an example the developing areas of Dublin, including its commuter belt, where there have been new schools for new areas of population. Where different areas have developed throughout Northern Ireland, have integrated schools been established that were not transformed from a previous existence? At secondary level here, plebiscites are held among parents about the type of second level schools they wish to have, including community, education and training board, ETB, or voluntary secondary. If a new second level school is deemed necessary in an area, who has the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making on what type of school it should be?

I gather from meeting different groups in Northern Ireland that often in higher socioeconomic strata - to use a terrible phrase, the more affluent areas - there was a bigger presence of integrated education than in places where people were on lower incomes. That was suggested to me but is there a good spread throughout the socioeconomic strata? I know it is not a measurement we all like but it is there.

Where there is no Minister in Stormont driving a programme, are those few years lost when momentum could have been gained in driving integrated education? We all know the budget is under a particular control. The departments are administered by civil servants so are they

in a position to make decisions if a school applies to change its status to being an integrated school? Do they have the authority in current administrative arrangements to make such decisions? There were worthy proposals for a major campus in Omagh and I presume that campus included plans for integrated schools at primary and secondary level. My understanding is the project has not proceeded at anything like the pace we would like to see.

**Chairman:** There were quite a few questions so perhaps the witnesses could address them.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** We will divide up the questions. The Deputy referred to measuring the socioeconomic levels of enrolments in integrated schools.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I suppose it would be a profile.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** I have figures from the Northern Ireland Department of Education. It is a crude measurement but it is the only one we have, and it is the number of free school meal entitlements. In integrated primary schools, the level is approximately 27.7%, whereas in non-integrated schools, that figure is 29%. At post-primary schools and not including non-selective schools, the level of free school meals for integrated schools is 38%, whereas in non-integrated schools, the level is 39%. The perception that integrated schools are very much for the middle class is not reflected in the free school meals numbers. Unlike many non-selective schools in the North, we have integrated schools where the free school meals level is as high as 75% in some areas. The perception is not correct.

The Deputy asked about the Strule campus at Omagh. It is a shared education campus, not an integrated campus. Five schools of different management types, Catholic-maintained and controlled, are relocating to one site. The Deputy is correct that it has not progressed and it has run into a number of issues with respect to procurement. There is also the question of getting agreement from schools as to what it will look like.

When there is no minister in Stormont driving a programme, will those years be lost where momentum could have been gained in driving integrated education. We all know the budget is under a particular control. Are the civil servants that currently administer the departments in a position to make decision if a school applies to change its status to being an integrated school? Do they have authority in the current administrative arrangement to make such decisions? There were very worthy proposals for major campus in Omagh

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** Can I just add to that? It is a very good point but there is an integrated campus in the same part of the world, in Omagh, which is the Drumragh Integrated College and Omagh Integrated primary school. This gives parents a choice for their children from the age of three through to 19.

**Chairman:** Would any witness care to comment on the difficulties presented by the Assembly not sitting?

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** It is very important to say that in the past three years since the Assembly came down, the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Derek Baker, has approved 25 of our development proposals for growth. The Assembly being down has not hampered our growth until very recently when we had five of our nursery units not approved. The reason was there was not enough money in the budget. Looking to the future, we are very perturbed that unless something is done around the Assembly getting up and running again and our education system in general receives more money into the system - because we believe there is not enough money in the system for it to run effectively - this could hamper our growth in the future. We feel that

until those recent turndowns, we have managed to grow despite the Assembly not being up and running.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** The figure of 8% appears to be low but, as mentioned earlier, no brand new integrated school to date has been opened by the Government. They have all been opened either by parental power or they have been transforming schools. We look forward to the future where that will change.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** It is important to say that 40 of the 65 schools referred to were started from scratch, as Amanda has said. The 65 schools over the 38 years roughly equates to two schools per year. I do not know any other organisations that are able to say they developed two schools per year, apart from Educate Together of course. The growth has been phenomenal. When one considers groups of parents coming together to start those, with no money, it is quite amazing. Of the schools, 40 started from scratch, meaning that most of the 65 schools were created as brand new schools.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** A question was asked if they are looking at a new school in a particular area. There are two planning authorities. That would be the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, CCMS, which looks after the Catholic-maintained schools, and there is the Education Authority, which looks after controlled schools. They plan for those sectors. As mentioned previously, there is no body planning for integrated schools. On top of that, we have an estimated 50,000 empty school desks. There is rationalisation going on within our education sector. It is being rationalised sectorally.

There is, however, an opportunity for the planning authorities to look at retaining education provision in a particular area. We may, for example, have a Catholic-maintained school and a controlled school that are both undersubscribed and where both planning authorities will make decisions on whether to close each of those schools. There is not really a process in place where one could look at how the two schools could come together to make a sustainable school. The Integrated Education Fund is working with Ulster University in developing a community consultation mechanism. We have been working with the Education Authority and the CCMS to see if they could include that within area planning. We believe we are making some progress on that. This would allow communities to decide what type of education provision they would like in their area. From polling attitudinal surveys we can see that the majority of parents would choose to have an integrated provision in their community rather than no school at all.

**Mr. Mickey Brady:** I thank the witnesses very much for the presentation. I congratulate the council on its Nobel nomination and I offer best wishes on that. I represent the Newry-Armagh constituency and I am very aware of Newry and Banbridge and the New-Bridge Integrated College from its inception, and I am well aware of the work it does. I believe that it does a great job. Initially, there was a feeling locally that the parents who sent their children to integrated schools were middle class and that it was an elitist thing. That is certainly not the case. Some of my children's friends have gone to New-Bridge college and one gets a very good insight into what that school is doing.

I have a couple of questions. Things have changed to some degree. I went to a convent primary school. There were girls there but we never saw them as there was a divider down the middle of the classroom. I then went to a single-sex primary school and then single-sex grammar school. The primary schools have changed and now it is mixed and so on. Where do the witnesses find the most opposition coming from? We would very much want to have all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement implemented. Surely the best way to promote reconciliation is

integrated education. That is a no-brainer - excuse the pun.

It is good to see that Lagan College, which has a very good reputation, is an all-ability school. With entrance tests, do children have to go through the five tests? I ask this because I did the 11-plus test a long time ago. We were told that we were the last year to do that. As we were the last class and supposedly the last year, we had the same teacher - a Christian brother - for four years from the ages of seven to 11. There were 43 pupils in the class and 43 of us passed the 11-plus. Some passed through academic ability and quite a lot through fear and other things. There are quite a lot of good all-ability schools in my constituency, including St. Patrick's High School, Keady and St. Paul's, and St. Joseph's in Crossmaglen. I was at a prize-giving recently and it is great to see the kids who are doing so well at every level. Integrated education is a step further, where that could be done. Coming from Newry, which has never really suffered the sectarian issues that other places in the North have experienced, one can see that reconciliation and integrated education have such an important part to play. I congratulate the council on the work it does. Unlike some of my colleagues here, I am very much aware of what New-Bridge Integrated College does.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** Mr. Brady asked where the most opposition comes from. In many senses, if we looked at it very simply, it is the controlled and maintained schools. It is well established how we came to be here and it was not a deliberate attempt to separate children or any such thing. We are, however, where we are and the statistics tell us - as Sam said earlier - that in general Protestant and Catholic children are not being educated together, never mind the other diversity that now exists all over Ireland but also in Northern Ireland. We need to look at it as a change management programme. Mr. Brady spoke of his school. There is an emotional attachment to school. We are trying to ask people to think differently about it. I would ask the Catholic-maintained schools and the controlled schools how they are going to attract people from the minority tradition into their schools. That is all we are asking them to think about. This is very difficult if it is not the traditional choice parents make. We are also asking parents to make different choices. We want to empower parents to make a choice. That choice is to call for the school to which they are emotionally attached, to which they went, that their children go to and that their parents went to, to transform to integrated status. The parents have that power. It is a legal process which takes a few years, but there is that intention. That is what we are asking people to do. We would be very grateful for anything anybody could do to help us to empower parents to make that choice and change their school.

**Chairman:** It is only recently that we have started to give parents those choices in this state.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** I will pick up on a few of the things that were said. I would like to talk about the factors that are limiting the progress of integrated education. For several years it has been lovely to see parents wanting to send their children to Lagan College where I have been the principal for ten years. It is a great blessing when parents are interested in our school and affirming in the work that we do. Our frustration stems from having to turn children and families away because we cannot physically accommodate more children on the site in south Belfast. As Ms Marshall said, if the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, CCMS, and the Education Authority are the decision-makers, they decide on the provision of funding to open or support new schools. We started with a grassroots organisation among parents and are now at a point where the governors are wondering if we should do it again. That is literally where we are as a school. It is heartbreaking having to turn children away. The newspapers state there is no demand, but we see it every year.

The other aspect I wish to mention is the all-abilities nature of the school. As I mentioned,

we welcome children of all backgrounds. That is reflected in our all-abilities status. Members may know that since the 1960s in the North of Ireland there have been grammar secondary schools and, in effect, the segregation of children along those lines. Most integrated schools are all-abilities and use a non-selective model. In the 1990s, before my time as principal, Lagan College decided to take the bilateral route because of its position in Belfast. It is in a very particular area in terms of parental choice. Many of our friends in the CCMS are now doing the same and opening new schools also. Children of all abilities come to Lagan College, but 35% of our intake are children whose parents have put them through the Association for Quality Education, AQE, or the GL assessment. It is something our board of governors considers every year. When they come back to sit in Stormont, we ask political leaders to look at this issue for Northern Ireland as a whole, rather than school by school.

**Ms Hilary Copeland:** I thank members for their acknowledgment of the work New-Bridge Integrated College has done in the past 20 years. When I went there, it was very obvious to me that every other child in my class in the small rural village where I went to primary school was put on a bus to go to another secondary school. It was a very deliberate decision on the part of their parents. I do not think the implications really struck me until I looked back as an adult. It was a rural village with a lot of farm families, ostensibly a mixed village, yet a lot of parents decided not to send their children to the school that was ten minutes' walk up the street. That was very powerful. When I attended New-Bridge Integrated College, I was amused to attend alongside so many other pupils who were in the opposite position. They had come on buses from Ballynahinch, Lisburn, Newry and Mayobridge. They would take two or sometimes three buses a day and I made friends with quite a range of people. My parents must have hated it. I had to be put in a car and driven to visit all of them. They lived all over the place. They must have wondered if I could have made friends with anybody who lived a little closer to home. To be serious, they did not hate it all. This was what the school allowed me to do - to make friends with lots of different people from many backgrounds. The opposition faced by my parents was striking. Neighbours and the families of children who went to the same primary school were critical of what they saw as a wrong decision. There is a lot of fear in small communities and it takes a very long time for it to dissipate. There are people who have not spoken to my parents since. We should not take for granted the decisions parents and the families of children have made to attend integrated schools. They are often the first in their families to do so. There may be other family members who do not agree with that decision and oppose it. Opposition to integrated education can be very close to home.

Until I had left and looked back I did not really realise what a brilliant experience the all-abilities aspect of my education had given me. As a student, I was academically able, but I did not want to go to the grammar school where I had a secure place. When I walked through the gates of New-Bridge Integrated College at the open day I adored the feeling I got from every pupil who was there and every teacher who welcomed me. That is a great reason I continue to talk about my school education more than 20 years later. There are not many adults who do that.

**Chairman:** It must have been very liberating.

**Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan:** First, I acknowledge the work the delegates have been doing. They have given us a very powerful insight into their own personal experiences. I believe in the principle of integration, but, as Deputy Brendan Smith said, 8% is a very small figure. Ms Copeland has outlined some of the obstacles to increasing that number. Are there other practical steps that could be taken to increase it? The delegates spoke about beginning with parents

and having to go through this process, but 8% is still a small figure after 20 or 30 years. Are the groups represented not getting the message out on the value of integrated education?

Given that schools are not being integrated, are there programmes between schools that aim to increase their awareness of each other and the issues other schools face? Communities might not be located on the same campus, but at least there might be some engagement between them.

I note that the Republic is becoming more multicultural. Does this reflect another challenge for integrated schools? We are no longer talking about the two traditional communities in the North but much wider communities.

I was interested in the question about the Irish language, but it has been answered.

My third question concerns teacher training. Is the principle of integrated education part of general teacher training, or are the delegates talking about a module that is additional, not compulsory? It appears that it should be compulsory as a part of teacher training.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** I would like to respond to the question about the figure of 8%. As Ms McNamee pointed out, many integrated schools are oversubscribed. If parents cannot get their children into an integrated school, there is no other option for them; therefore, they have to opt for one under another type of management. There are only 65 integrated schools, which reduces the opportunities for parents to send their kids to integrated schools. That the figure is just under 8% is remarkable, given that the Government has never planned an integrated school. As we said, all of the schools have been established by parents, whether they are grant main-tained integrated, GMI, schools or transformed schools. They are parent-led. It is a challenge to ask parents to remodel the education system in the North. That is a job for politicians and officials within the Department. Our challenge as a movement is not just to grow integrated education in response to parental demand. We need the education system to be redesigned. I may be repeating myself, but there are over 50,000 empty school desks. There is an extensive tale of underachievement in schools. All schools have a budget crisis. It is predicted that next year there will be a £300 million shortfall for schools, many of which are in deficit. We need political leadership and the will to make integrated education the norm, rather than a lifestyle choice for parents to create for themselves. I hope that provides a little context for the figure of 8%.

**Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan:** Mr. Fitzsimmons referred to officials. Is there a resistance on the part of officialdom to the principle of having integrated schools?

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** We need political leadership to advise and instruct the officials to deliver on their statutory duty. There is a need for a better informed officialdom on integrated education.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** The Department of Education has a duty to encourage and facilitate and it is to be assisted by the Education Authority. There is a vital word missing in that provi-sion which is “promote”. It is handed over to us. If someone thinks just over £500,000 and a few members of staff will suddenly change hundreds of years of culture and traditional choices, he or she needs to think again about resources. That is why we have the integrated education fund to raise funds to kick-start integrated development in certain areas. It is not good enough in a lot of ways.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan asked about other projects. In the past ten years shared educa-tion has developed. We are talking about collaboration between schools and the promotion of

peace and reconciliation between them and the children and adults within school communities. That is good and it has developed at a very rapid pace. It is the first cross-party supported peace and reconciliation project for a very long time, but it will never replace integrated education. Integrated schools are a school type. It is important to understand integrated education and its development within a shared education context will I hope be easier in the future. Schools are building relationships. When I was growing up in a small town in Country Down, we used to peer over the wall on a Sunday evening at the Protestant school. That coming and going between schools did not happen at the time. It is happening now in Northern Ireland, which is to be commended, but our model of all-day, every-day learning, playing and working together is surely the way for our society to learn to live together, as opposed to within the separate silos. That is helping.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan also mentioned diversity more broadly in schools. We are the council for integrated education, not diversity within education. Every single school in Northern Ireland has a responsibility to be diverse and ensure the inclusion of all children, irrespective of ability, disability, family background, community, race or culture. We are specifically in place to promote peace and reconciliation through integrated education. Ours is the largest, most sustainable and cost-effective community relations project in Northern Ireland. For very little money, we are changing hearts and minds at a rapid pace. We have a very specific mission - to ensure the two main communities, plus everyone else, are educated together. The possibility of children being educated together is what we stand for collectively.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** From a practitioner’s point of view, schools must welcome all children, irrespective of background, learning ability or newcomer status as immigrants from other countries. The teaching vocation is about supporting those children to learn, be happy and have fun in their early years. In Lagan we have a number of children who have come through newcomer status in the country. We support their needs, as we would those of any other child, be they special needs or certain gifts or talents. It is our job to encourage children to pursue what they enjoy and become better at doing it.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan mentioned growth. As a leader in education, I hear politicians speak a great deal about equality and respect, but there may be a need for more talk about shared housing and education. In the wider sense, we are passionate about shared education as it is an important vehicle for children to meet one another. I had the opportunity to meet children coming into the education profession through a PGCE placement. I asked them if they had ever met somebody of a different religion or if they had friends from one and it still shocked me to find young men and women, not too far from Ms Copeland in age, who had never met somebody from the other major tradition in Northern Ireland. It was a shocking revelation. It is, therefore, in all our interests to do our best to enable any child who wishes to come to an integrated school to have his or her learning needs met.

I was asked recently to speak in front of St. Mary’s and Stranmillis students who will be the teachers of the future. It is rewarding to have been invited to speak to them next Tuesday. It will be the second time I will have spoken to them on what the grounds are for integrated education and inclusive practice. It is happening. There is a joint module for trainee teachers at St. Mary’s and Stranmillis which is encouraging and a first step in the right direction.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** For all sorts of reasons, teachers and classroom assistants end up working in integrated schools. However, there is no dedicated induction programme or training and development in being a teacher in an integrated school. That is something about which we think a great deal. We hope to go back to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade very

soon to say a larger strategy is needed. All of our teachers and every school are struggling with the same issues. The question is how do we prepare these teachers and share that learning across the education system generally. While it might be possible to facilitate some of it through shared education, it is so important that it needs to be at the heart of any teacher institution developing the teachers of the future.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** I thank the delegates for the presentation so far. It has been very informative and useful. I also commend the delegates on the nomination which is quite the achievement. I have every confidence in them. I had a brilliant visit to Lagan College when I was Lord Mayor of Belfast. I went to Malone College and a few others also. It was great. One knows as soon as one walks into a school whether it is a happy and healthy one in which people are doing well. Certainly, I picked up on it there. While I would never presume to tell the delegates what to do, they might find it valuable before they leave to extend an invitation to committee members to come to see it in practice for themselves.

I have a couple of questions about some of the issues raised and on which I would like the delegates to expand. I am keen to know what is the difference between an integrated school and a non-denominational or multidenominational school. How does it play out in practice? We want all schools to be integrated, but is that going to be possible in reality? Different aspects have to be taken into consideration, including the right to choice etc. I was impressed and pleased to hear about the work undertaken by Lagan College to make Irish available for study up to A level because I have a particular interest in the language. I also congratulate its Gaelic football team on winning the JJ Riley Cup last year. Are such developments replicated across the sector or are they unique to Lagan, Belfast or particular geographic areas? Will the witnesses also tell me about the Integration Works project and the importance of support from the Department for the project and, indeed, other projects?

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** Regarding differences in integration, I presume the Senator was referring to Catholic-maintained, non-denominational, multi-denominational, faith-based schools?

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Yes, and I will give an example. The last thing I want to do is pit sector against sector. I am, however, talking in a frank way because it is important that a committee like this functions in that manner. I went through non-denominational education. The religious sacraments were available to people if they chose them. People from Jewish and Protestant backgrounds also attended the school and they did not have to choose them. The unifying element was the delivery of education through the medium of Irish. Perhaps I was at an integrated school all along and did not know it. My point is that if we are going to advocate for a universal model, then we must be careful that such a model is not at the expense or detriment of another model. I want to give the witnesses the opportunity to provide reassurance. Mr. Jim Gibney, who works in my office, always refers to “lighting a candle as opposed to cursing the dark”. I ask the witnesses to light a candle on this issue and reassure us.

**Chairman:** For an audience listening at home, language such as “controlled school” conjures up a particular image. That is the description but it is not how we would describe a school in the South.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** I will kick off on this question. There are Catholic-maintained schools and controlled schools. Most Catholic parents choose Catholic education by default, even though the Protestant Churches transferred their schools over in 1947. The majority of controlled schools, then, are those from a perceived Protestant background. There is of course diversity within all of those schools as well. In general, however, Catholic parents do not

choose controlled school education. There are anomalies. That is where we are at the moment.

Integrated schools deliberately, proactively and intentionally strive for a balance between Catholics, Protestants and others within their schools. Some people ask why that is necessary. Our answer is to ask why we needed something similar in respect of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, PSNI. We sometimes need to do these things to ensure people have a voice. Research shows that once we go below 10%, sometimes people get very quiet and feel they do not have a voice. We deliberately try, therefore, to create schools that have an equal, or balanced, pupil population and board of governors. That is an important distinction to make.

Catholic-maintained schools have a number of Catholic trustees on every school board. Controlled schools have had transfers from the three main churches: the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Church of Ireland. In every controlled school of nine governors, for example, almost half, four of those nine, will be from the transferrers, that is from the Protestant churches. The governors set the culture and strategic direction of the school. They also, however, determine what happens within the school. We suggest that what makes integrated schools different is that they strive to have a balance within their board of governors. That means, therefore, that all of the children will see their culture and tradition reflected in the governing body and in the staff. Does that answer Senator Ó Donnghaile's question?

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Yes, it does.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** I will add a little more on that question. Amanda alluded earlier to what happens in an integrated school. It is about addressing diversity and celebrating diversity within the school. There is an opportunity to that because of the diversity within the school. That does not happen within a single-tradition school. As was pointed out, less than 8% of Catholics go to Protestant-controlled schools and less than 1% of Protestants go to a Catholic school. In essence, only one narrative is being heard within those schools. Within an integrated school, however, multiple narratives are being heard, not just in the playground but also in the staffroom and the classroom.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** I will pick up on that point. My sister-in-law is an Irish-medium primary school teacher in Strabane. She set up that school some years ago. What happens in that school is very close to my heart. A lot of brilliant inclusive practice is going on, as has been mentioned. The edge of where we take integrated education, as Ms Marshall stated earlier, lies across all different strands. It sounds as if Senator Ó Donnghaile had a very inclusive experience, which would not have been too far away from making that move into being an integrated school. That would have been the case if there had been children of other faiths and backgrounds attending the school. I am sure there were children from different ethnicities and cultures but perhaps not from the other main denominational traditions in Northern Ireland.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Ms McNamee is correct. That was not really the case. I understand what she is saying and this is an interesting discussion. I want to return to the point made by Ms Copeland. Much of what she said in her opening presentation rang true in respect of my own experience. I was educated upstairs in the Cultúrlann before it was refurbished into the beautiful facility that it is now. We were really up against it regarding our experience. That was also a great unifier. It was a great way to instil a positive ethos and unifying spirit within any school. I am keen to talk to Ms Copeland to get tips on establishing a similar body for those of us who have passed through Irish-medium education to enable us to become champions and advocates for that approach. Aside from everything else, it would be useful because we are in a climate where many young people going through that sector feel abused and vilified, given

many of the public statements made in recent times. I appreciate the presentation today and what the witnesses are doing. There would be merit in us taking a look at what is happening in Lagan College, whenever that might be possible. Regarding Irish as an A level subject and Gaelic sports, which are available in Lagan College, is there similar availability across the sector or is it confined to certain areas? I am not trying to put anybody on the spot and it might not be practical.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** Yes, it is. I better put a plug in for Drumragh Integrated College because it won the JJ Riley Cup the year before us.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** Very good.

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** I had the lovely opportunity of working in Drumragh in 1998 at a difficult time for that community. Senator Ó Donnghaile comes from a background of enjoying politics. As a principal of an integrated school, I love seeing our young people coming from all different angles of politics and having the ability to debate without fear or judgment while still holding different opinions. Our young people want to talk about many things have happened in recent years. They may have differences of opinion on Brexit and what is going to happen in Ireland, Northern Ireland and-or the north of Ireland. We should be encouraging those young people not to be afraid to talk it through because if people do not talk it through and communicate, we will take a step back to what we had before, which is people being fearful of one another and not really understanding what happens in each of our respective homes and communities.

**Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:** I agree with that and I commend that statement to every single school, no matter where it is. Senator Craughwell and I had an interesting discussion in the Seanad earlier - although he was not in the room for my contribution - about the climate we are in. I come from a school of thought that believes that regardless of where something is or what it is about, the more young people are empowered to be engaged in politics, critical thought and activism, the better. Any school ethos that promotes and enables that, without pushing it, is positive and commendable and is worth supporting.

**Chairman:** Now is the time for Senator Craughwell to speak.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** I am sorry I was not here for the presentation. I was engaged in something else. Believe it or not, I grew up in a segregated society in Salthill in Galway. Boys swam in different places to girls and girls did not go to the same schools as boys did. It was a different sort of segregation and I am delighted to inform my colleague, Senator Ó Donnghaile, that in 1967, young people found their voices and came forward and we had integrated swimming in Salthill for the first time ever, which was something to behold, and I was fully behind it.

I spent 25 years of my life teaching and I am all for young people having a voice. I am totally against exploiting young people in order for adults to have their voices heard, but that is another story and Senator Ó Donnghaile and I can argue that out in the future. The shared education system is good as a second-class alternative. Integration is the only way forward, but having spent 25 years in education, I can tell the witnesses that education change comes slowly, even with simple matters such as changing a teacher midway through a course. There can be a poor teacher teaching a subject who is replaced by an excellent teacher halfway through a course, and students will complain because people get used to certain systems. I want to go back to 1967 and the introduction of girls into the technical school, for which I must compliment the

vocational education system in Ireland because it abandoned religion and concentrated on its core ethos of education. That changed the lives of many of us who went to school there. We saw girls as fellow human beings, and I would hope I carried that attitude with me through my life, rather than as some strange object who were over a wall, as Ms Marshall mentioned. We sneaked up and looked over that wall because we wanted to see what was going on over there.

The work the witnesses are doing is really important. Two weeks ago, I was up in Northern Ireland and I had a long discussion with some people from the Unionist tradition. One of the matters they were applauding was the increased level of mixed marriages in the North. That will impact the provision of the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education as time goes on. Every time someone comes from Northern Ireland I regret to say that the “B word” has to be used to talk about budgets. My concern is around funding. If the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education are to be successful, two things will matter as they go forward. The first is results. Parents will abandon all beliefs if there are results in the school, regardless of where the school is. I am mindful of a particular school in Dublin that had the most appalling first year to sixth year students. One had to go in there wearing a flak jacket and a gas mask to survive a class but it had one repeat leaving certificate class and parents from the richest parts of Dublin sent their children there because they were guaranteed results. Results are the lifeblood of the school and there is no doubt at all about that. Opening up opportunity is also important. Given that the witnesses have the imagination to be involved in integrated education, I believe they will also be open to alternatives to third-level education. We are pushing too many children to undertake third-level education so I would assume the witnesses are interested in apprenticeships and in parity of esteem across the different vocational and academic routes one can take.

With the onset of Brexit, and we have no idea what will happen with that over the next few days, weeks and months, my concern is that if we have a break between the UK and Europe, the funding that may have been available will be at risk. I am not sure how much of the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education’s funding would come through the peace process system but if it is not much then maybe they do not have too much to fear. Funding is really important. I am always concerned about politicians in the South talking about what is going on in the North because in truth, so few people from the South travel up and experience the North. It is a wonderful place and a beautiful country and I love the people up there. I also love getting my car fixed up there because it was cheaper for me when I was up there two weeks ago than it would have been down here but that is another day’s work. Results and funding are the key issues. Without funding, the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education are not able to employ the staff who will provide the results so I am interested in the views of the witnesses on that.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** Those are very good points. We would concur that every school has to be a good school first and foremost and then parents will buy into the ethos. Funding is something we are also concerned about. We are very grateful for the £300 million allocated to integrated schools for their capital buildings, without which some of those schools would not have survived much longer because the schools were built with a core and mobile classrooms. They had a main block and mobile classrooms with a lifespan of 15 years to 20 years, most of which have surpassed that marker now. With that comes revenue as well. As our schools grow, the numbers of children attending integrated schools since the Good Friday Agreement have doubled. That is not a story a lot of people know about because the growth of school buildings is what is talked about but the number of integrated schools has doubled. With that comes the necessary revenue for teaching staff, for growth within the school buildings and so on as the

school grows. That revenue is not there to back up the capital funding and we are concerned about that, particularly now as we have five development proposals for nursery units. Every child deserves the best start in life and if they do not have the opportunity for education in an integrated setting from age three that concerns us because the reason we were given was a lack of funding. That is the first time in our history we have ever heard that. We had to raise our own money through the Integrated Education Fund or through borrowing from the club bank but eventually, when we proved the viability of a school, the Department of Education would invest in it and a lot of the money would have come through Europe at that time. That is our concern. To me, integrated education would grow exponentially if it was financially incentivised. There is no doubt in my mind that would happen. Some £43 million is going into shared education, which is fantastic, but none of that money went into integrated education. It went to integrated schools that are involved in shared education but not to integrated education itself. Anything we can do to change that situation will be vital for the growth of integrated education.

**Mr. Mickey Brady:** I would like to make a comment on funding because it is so important.

**Chairman:** This is the last comment. I will finish up shortly

**Mr. Mickey Brady:** I want to talk about funding because I spent eight years in the Northern Ireland Assembly and I was on the Northern Ireland Committee for Health during that time. Some 43% of the Executive's budget was spent on health and the other 57% was spent on education, infrastructure and so on. There was simply not enough money. Part of the problem, if not the entire problem, is Tory austerity. They took approximately £1.2 billion off the Executive's budget during the eight years I was there and that has not been replaced. Therein lies the problem because we do not have fiscal levers in the North even if the Assembly is up and running. It should be because, obviously, local people would make local decisions and better decisions. That needs to be addressed as well. We get a cake that one slices it up as best as one can and this is the case across the educational sector. The position integrated education is in is even worse because it does not get the funding it should be getting anyhow so therein lies the problem.

Brexit will be a disaster for everybody. I go to Westminster. I was over there this week and the previous week. Nobody has a clue what is happening, including the people who are supposed to make decisions, but funding for integrated education is an even bigger problem in many ways because schools are relying on parents and fundraising. This is why they have the organisation they have, which is to be commended, because they are very much on their own in that sense. The two governments have responsibility to ensure the Good Friday Agreement is implemented and a major part of that is the promotion of integrated education.

**Chairman:** Do the witnesses want to sum up?

**Ms Amanda McNamee:** I will pick up on the Chairman's point. Schools are essentially about helping children to learn about themselves, others and their future career paths and prospects. As has been mentioned, every school wishes to be a good school. The joy of working in an integrated school is we have children of all abilities. They will go into the workplace be that through university, apprenticeships, gap years or charity organisations. It is a joy to see one can make a difference to children aged between 11 and 18. As a principal and a mother of a child who attends an integrated school, I believe that integrated education is doing much more than that. It is our civic duty to encourage children to make sure we do not make the mistakes of the past by integrating them into understanding what peace looks and feels like. None of us knows what Brexit will feel like but as a principal, I must be optimistic that the children will go

forward and, hopefully, make a difference in the world.

**Ms Hilary Copeland:** One point I would like the committee to take away is how much learning takes place among students. I learned a great deal from my peers at New-Bridge Integrated College. When I started secondary school, I had never seen a GAA jersey. I made friends with a girl in my class from Mayobridge who was a Kerry supporter. I do not want to talk too much about Kerry today but-----

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** Ms Copeland would be well advised.

**Ms Hilary Copeland:** I relocated to Dublin this summer and took up the post of acting director of the Irish Writers Centre. I have just moved outside Croke Park and have become a great deal more acquainted with GAA jerseys. It is about learning from people who can share their stories with each other, ask, "What's that?", and explain it to somebody who is on their level in a way that is without fear and judgement - possibly a bit of judgement because kids are very good at ribbing each other. I learned more there about cultural differences than I could have been taught formally. As chair of Integrated AlumNI, I have the privilege of working with adults who feel this is so important to them that they want to give up their time and energy to continue to talk about it. It is difficult to manage a committee. Everyone has different opinions and is coming from different positions. What better training for dealing with difficult political issues than being taught and formed as an adult to share their experiences, discuss differences and learn how to do that in a grown-up fashion, which I would love to see reflected in our political leadership.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** A question was asked about how the integration process works. We can certainly send more information about that. That relates to parental and community engagement, trying to educate people about integrated education and empowering parents to transform the school to an integrated one regardless of its current management type. An integrated school can be either grant-maintained, which means the board of governors is its managing authority, or a controlled integrated school, which means the education authority is the managing authority. The good news is that this transformation is open to every school apart from special schools and hospital schools so any school can switch to integrated status. Why would a school not transform if it has a mix of Protestants and Catholics?

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** How many controlled schools have transformed?

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** The number is 27.

**Senator Gerard P. Craughwell:** That is good.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** As we go forward, that number will increase. It has increased in the past couple of years. Six schools are going through the process with possibly another five coming down the track. It will gain momentum. Our invitation is to all schools that are great schools that serve the communities and do everything well. On top of that, they can be integrated schools, which means that they are openly declaring to their wider community circle that they are places that want to promote reconciliation and peace in Ireland.

**Chairman:** Perhaps that is a positive note on which to end.

**Mr. Sam Fitzsimmons:** The best way to conclude today is by, once again, thanking the committee for giving us the opportunity to come down here and talk about what we are passionate about, namely, integrated education. We extend an invitation to the committee to visit

an integrated school.

**Chairman:** Do the witnesses need to go into a huddle now to decide this?

**Ms Hilary Copeland:** No, the committee is very welcome. Senator Ó Donnghaile lives a stone's throw from us anyway so he could pick the rest of the committee members up overnight. He could provide bed and breakfast for them.

**Ms Roisin Marshall:** Like many integrated schools when they started, for many years, teachers and students in Lagan College spent their lives in mobile classrooms but the school now has a shiny new building that is beautiful. I also extend an invitation to visit one of our schools that is struggling with its building.

**Chairman:** That is always positive. On behalf of the committee, I thank the witnesses for their positive and refreshing presentation and wish them well with the Nobel Prize nomination. Perhaps when they get the nomination, they might come back and visit us but we will take them up on their kind invitation and, hopefully, meet up in the future. We will now go into private session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.58 p.m and adjourned at 4.30 p.m. until Thursday, 10 October 2019.